



THE TOCSIN

A DRAMA OF
THE RENAISSANCE

BY

ESTHER BROWN
TIFFANY

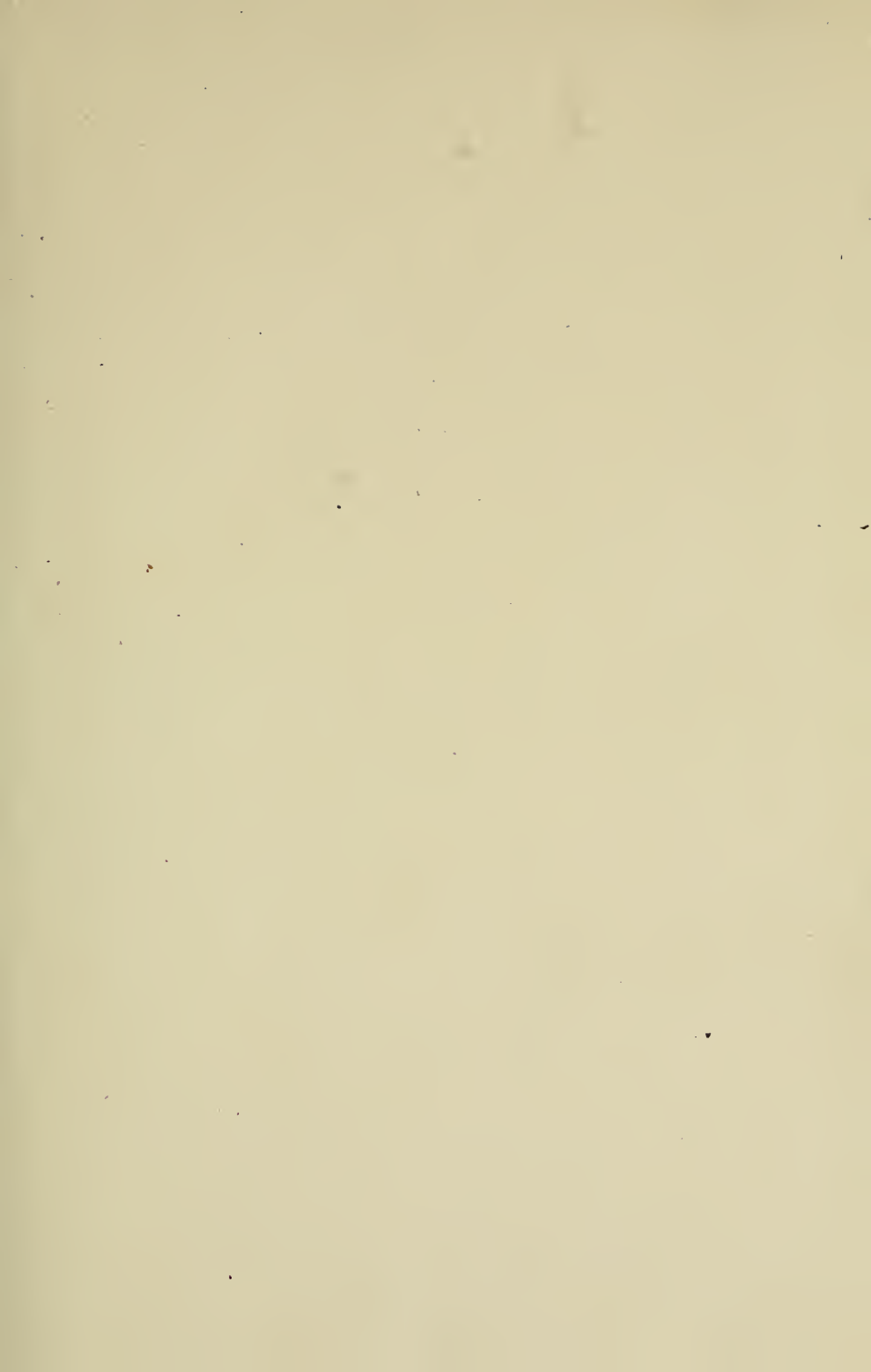


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THE TOCSIN



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A DRAMA OF THE RENAISSANCE

By ESTHER BROWN TIFFANY

INTERPOSE AT THE DIFFICULT MINUTE,
SNATCH SAUL THE MISTAKE,
SAUL THE FAILURE, THE RUIN HE SEEMS
NOW,—AND BID HIM AWAKE
FROM THE DREAM, THE PROBATION, THE
PRELUDE, TO FIND HIMSELF SET
CLEAR AND SAFE IN NEW LIGHT AND NEW
LIFE,——

BROWNING'S "SAUL."



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TO THE MEMORY OF
MY FATHER
FRANCIS TIFFANY

ARGUMENT

Florence, under Francesco de' Medici and his Grand Duchess, the "infamous" Bianca Cappello, is smitten by famine and plague. Among those who flee the death-stricken city is the Abbot of San Raffaello. The Abbot is a man of dual nature—brilliant, cynical, pleasure-loving, generous, impressionable; dowered with wit, charm, genius, and, true child of the Renaissance, a passionate worshipper of the beautiful. Conscious though he is of the cowardice of deserting his post at such a time, he yet summons his cowering monks about him for flight to the pure air of the Apennines. They go to the seat of his cousin, Bianca delle Torre, the new favorite of Francesco de' Medici.

In the Abbot's train is Marianna, a young peasant girl disguised, for her better protection, as a boy. She has but lately come to Florence, having left her mountain hamlet in the vain hope of tracing her absent lover, Lorenzo, who is a ward of the Abbot.

To the desolate and deserted city comes an angel of mercy in the person of Sister Maddalena, a "Poor Claire," as the nuns of the third or uncloistered order of St. Francis were called. They were vowed to a life of poverty and charity. Herself a Florentine of noble birth, she has for years been a wanderer on the face of the earth, and only returns to her beloved city at its cry of need. Her devout life is the result of a deep religious experience of her youth. Years before, in the Duomo, she had been overwhelmed by

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the impassioned eloquence of a young priest. Fired by his burning words, she had renounced the world and its pleasures to lead so inspired a life of prayer and charity that she is now regarded throughout Tuscany as a saint. The young priest, at that time in deacon's orders, was no other than the Abbot of San Raffaello. Of his dual nature, and of his sinking deeper and deeper into the luxury and license of the time, she knows nothing. Shrining his image in her heart, she prays that the hour may come when she may meet him once more face to face and, falling at his knees, bathe his blessed feet with her tears of thanksgiving.

In Pistoia, not far from Castle delle Torre, Pope Sixtus V., stern old Peretti, is holding counsel with Francesco de' Medici, and here the Abbot's ward, Lorenzo, asking audience of His Holiness, has the misfortune to drop a loaded pistol at the pontiff's feet. A new edict has just been promulgated against bearing arms in the papal presence, and Lorenzo thus falls under sentence of death. From this penalty Marianna, who has come to Castle delle Torre with the Abbot and his flock, saves her lover by a bold night ride for his pardon. In the meantime, however, Lorenzo has fallen into the toils of the beautiful Bianca delle Torre, and for a while Marianna is left desolate.

To Pistoia, also, comes Sister Maddalena to interview the Pope concerning the pestilence. On her way she stops at Castle delle Torre. The iniquities of the two Biancas, Bianca Cappello, the Grand Duchess, and Bianca delle Torre, the new favorite, oppress her soul. She believes that Florence suffers for the sins of its rulers; that the Almighty is moved to wipe the plague-spot from the earth. She comes to plead with Bianca, but here at length in Castle delle Torre are the prayers of a lifetime answered. In the moon-

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lit courtyard, jesting over his wine, Sister Maddalena meets the Abbot and throws herself on her knees before the man whose image she has so long held sacred. Then, like a stroke of lightning, comes the revelation to each. Aghast, she learns what a mistaken ideal she has been cherishing of this man of sin whom she has felt to be the instrument of her salvation. Mystery of mysteries! her sainthood the outcome of his wasted life! He on his part, overcome with self-loathing and moved by the stirrings of his old faith, calls about him the trembling monks, exhorts and inspires them; then, holding aloft the cross, he places himself at their head, and leads them back to Florence, the city of the dying and the dead.

THE TOCSIN

A DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS

CHARACTERS OF THE DRAMA

ABBOT

OF THE BENEDICTINE MONASTERY OF SAN RAFFAELLO AT FLORENCE

LORENZO TORNABUONI

THE ABBOT'S WARD

SIR WALTER HOWARD & COUNT SALVIATI

YOUNG NOBLEMEN AND SUITORS TO BIANCA

BROTHER SEBASTIANO & BROTHER FILIPO

OF THE ORDER OF ST. BENEDICT

BARDI

A BEGGAR, FORMER SECRETARY TO THE MEDICI

CAPTAIN

OF THE PAPAL GUARD

BIANCA DELLE TORRE

A YOUNG WIDOWED COUNTESS, COUSIN TO THE ABBOT

SISTER MADDALENA

OF THE THIRD OR UNCLOISTERED ORDER OF ST. FRANCIS

MARIANNA (*alias* GABRIELLO)

A PEASANT GIRL

NITA

WAITING WOMAN TO BIANCA

MONKS, SERVANTS, CHOIR BOYS, ETC.

*The scene is laid in 1586, first in Florence,
afterward in Castle delle Torre outside the City of Pistoia, at the
foot of the Apennines.*



ACT I

A stately garden in Florence, belonging to Count Salviati. Marble fountains and statues of nymphs gleam from among the ilexes and oleanders. At one side is the brick wall, time-stained and mellow with age, of the abbey of San Raffaello. The wall is pierced with a rich doorway, crowned by a figure of the archangel Raphael. At the rear of the garden another gate and wall shut off the street. In the foreground is a table for three, sumptuously set. Two servants in livery are bringing in flagons of wine and dishes of fruit.

FIRST SERVANT. At six were they to come?

SECOND SERVANT. At six, by the Abbot's watch.

FIRST SERVANT. And at six tomorrow, by the Abbot's watch, we may all be dead of the plague.

SECOND SERVANT. Drink, then, while we may. (*He drinks from one of the flagons.*)

FIRST SERVANT (*drinking and smacking his lips*). Ah, that would put life into the dead.

SECOND SERVANT. Yes, when his Reverence is bid to supper, my master brings out his best.

FIRST SERVANT. But where are the flowers?

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SECOND SERVANT. His Reverence's page was to bring them.

FIRST SERVANT. That close-mouthed Gabriello? I cannot squeeze a word out of him about his own affairs, or the Abbot's, either.

SECOND SERVANT. No, he holds himself as much aloof as the Grand Duchess herself.

FIRST SERVANT. And was picked up in the gutter, was he not?

SECOND SERVANT. Some such story. For all his round eyes, he knows on which side his bread is buttered. No wonder he fawns on his Reverence like a stray dog.

FIRST SERVANT. There's not a stray dog in Florence that does not fawn on his Reverence.

(The convent gate opens and discloses Marianna, dressed as a page, her arms full of flowers.)

SECOND SERVANT. Ah, there is Gabriello now.

FIRST SERVANT. Make haste. Must we wait all night?

MARIANNA (*hurrying forward*). Am I late? Every rose I saw was so much more beautiful than the last, that I had to stop and pick it. These for the head, Luigi, and these to crown the fruit. (*She decorates the table.*)

FIRST SERVANT. There are no other such roses in Florence.

MARIANNA. No, his Reverence has only to touch a plant and it bursts into flower. How I love to see him pacing up and down his rose-alleys, in the sun, his dog rubbing its nose against his white robe, and to hear him talk to his roses.

SECOND SERVANT. Talk to his roses?

MARIANNA (*shrinking back at Luigi's laugh*). Oh, in jest, as he does to dogs, or the boys of the Sanctuary,—or to me! (*The servants move off, laughing. Marianna picks up a white rose and looks at it dreamily.*) Why would he not pull it himself, the Reverend Father? I found him bend-

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ing over it, but his hands were behind his back. "Here, Gabriello," he said, "I have sworn to this white virgin, my hands should not touch her. You alone must break her from her stalk."

FIRST SERVANT (*looking disapprovingly at the table*). After all, you have brought too few.

MARIANNA. I will run back for more.

SECOND SERVANT. Here come his Excellency the Count and Sir Walter Howard.

(*They stand back. Enter Count Salviati and Sir Walter Howard from the side opposite the convent.*)

COUNT SALVIATI (*to Marianna*). Where is the Reverend Father?

MARIANNA. His Reverence bade me give you a thousand pardons, but he must be late. Important letters. He begs you will not wait for him. (*She bows and goes out through the convent gate.*)

COUNT SALVIATI (*to Sir Walter*). Well, then, let us try these nectarines till he joins us. (*They seat themselves at the table.*)

SIR WALTER. Yes, we English are a soberer race than you Tuscans.

COUNT SALVIATI. And habitually invite the skeleton to the feast.

SIR WALTER. We find it less easy to turn our eyes from him, when he stands grinning in at our gates, as now.

COUNT SALVIATI. Ah, the famine and the plague. You wonder how we who yet live can make merry.

SIR WALTER. Florence is dying for bread.

COUNT SALVIATI (*to one of the servants*). Music, Luigi. (*Luigi goes to summer-house, where the musicians are, and brings them forward.*)

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SIR WALTER (*shuddering*). Pisa is a charnal-house; hundreds lie unburied in the streets. Husbands desert their wives, mothers their children.

COUNT SALVIATI (*shrugging his shoulders*). And we feast. (*He turns impatiently to the musicians.*) Something gay. (*The players break into a wild dance-measure. Count Salviati waves his hand.*) Softly. (*They move toward the rear, playing with fire but in low tones.*)

SIR WALTER. A dirge were fitter.

COUNT SALVIATI. When you marry the beautiful Bianca delle Torre and become one of us, you will understand us better.

SIR WALTER (*gloomily*). More chance there for you than for me.

COUNT SALVIATI (*gaily*). Neck and neck at present. (*A dancer appears from among the musicians and begins a wild, graceful dance. Count Salviati applauds a moment with a "brava!" then turns again to Sir Walter, who pays no heed to the dancer.*) Would it check your pace, you with your strange island conventionalities, should I whisper that the Grand Duke himself is in the running?

SIR WALTER (*starting to his feet*). Francesco de' Medici?

COUNT SALVIATI (*luxuriously enjoying his fruit*). Francesco de' Medici.

SIR WALTER. But his Duchess still lives.

COUNT SALVIATI (*shrugging his shoulders*). Yes, she still lives, that other, that terrible Bianca Cappello. But you look pale. (*He fills his glass.*) To the ripe lips of your intended, Bianca delle Torre.

(*As they are drinking a knocking at the gate is heard above the dance music. One of the servants opens the gate and Sister Maddalena, a child in her arms, is seen at the*

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entrance. She stands severe and solemn in her gray Franciscan dress. About her clings a group of half-clad, famine-stricken women and children. An old man with traces of better days about him follows in their train. Count Salviati and Sir Walter turn and gaze amazed.)

SISTER MADDALENA (*to Luigi*). Whose feast is this?

SERVANT. The noble Count Salviati's. (*He motions the group away, but Sister Maddalena, with a commanding gesture, stops him and enters, her people following timidly.*)

SISTER MADDALENA. Count Salviati, I bring your guests. (*She holds up a silencing hand to the musicians and the dancing-girl, who pause confused and irresolute.*)

COUNT SALVIATI (*turning angrily*). What does this mean! Luigi!

SERVANT (*deprecatingly*). I could not help—pardon me, Sir Count!

SISTER MADDALENA (*in the same tone of calm command*). Rise, Count Salviati, and you, sir (*to Sir Walter*), rise, and welcome your guests.

(*Count Salviati, half in anger, half as though constrained by some superior will, rises and with him Sir Walter.*)

COUNT SALVIATI (*to Sister Maddalena*). Who in the devil's name are you that dare —

SISTER MADDALENA (*to the trembling women*). Eat. Drink. (*She places the child in the arms of one of them and pours out wine. They cluster about the table eating ravenously. Count Salviati and Sir Walter stand confounded.*)

SIR WALTER (*to Count Salviati*). What is she?

COUNT SALVIATI. Some half-crazed fanatic, her head turned by the famine.

SISTER MADDALENA (*to servants*). Serve your master's guests. (*The servants look toward the Count for orders.*)

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COUNT SALVIATI (*with an assumption of his former light manner*). By all means, Luigi. Make haste. Serve the noble ladies. And if they are weary, lead them to the arbor yonder and bring silken coverlets and cushions for their delicate heads. For when ladies (*he bows profoundly, his hand on his heart*), so fair, so radiant, condescend to grace my humble board—— (*Sister Maddalena turns with head erect and looks silently full at Count Salviati. He stops in full breath and grasps Sir Walter's arm.*) The fiend take the woman. She has the evil eye. Speak to her, Sir Walter; send her packing. You English are not afraid of the evil eye. There are my servants waiting on her, like whipped hounds.

SIR WALTER. Let us call his Reverence.

COUNT SALVIATI (*with an air of relief*). Well said. (*They pass out through the abbey gate. Sister Maddalena approaches the old man, who sits in a brooding attitude, his cup untasted, his head in his hand. His air is haggard and wild.*)

SISTER MADDALENA. You eat nothing.

BARDI (*looking up dazed*). Eh?

SISTER MADDALENA. Eat. Drink.

BARDI (*feverishly*). Yes, yes. To give me strength. To give me strength.

(*Sister Maddalena takes a silver salver from the table, fills it with water from the fountain and places it at old Bardi's feet. Then she brings one of the fine napkins, kneels down before him and begins to unfasten his sandals. He appears only half conscious of her action, forgetting his food and falling into his former brooding attitude. Sister Maddalena bathes and wipes his feet.*)

SISTER MADDALENA. Poor wounded foot.

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BARDI. Wounded? Ah, that was but a sharp stone, but here, in my side, the stiletto thrust ——

SISTER MADDALENA. Let me see the wound.

BARDI (*grasping his robe about him and speaking with a fierce intensity*). No, no, let it rankle, let it fester, that not for one moment I forget.

SISTER MADDALENA. Beware lest you forget to forgive.

BARDI (*his voice rising shrilly*). Forgive? I forgive, who spent my life for the Grand Duchess—sold my honor? I was her scribe, and now that she sickens, the Grand Duke would turn for his pleasures to a fresher face. He hired me; and I am trapped by the Duchess with a love-token to the new favorite, and thrust through with cold steel ——

SISTER MADDALENA. O Lord, how long!

BARDI (*seizing her hand as his tone changes to one of exultant malice*). Listen, Sister. The new favorite, her name too is Bianca—Bianca delle Torre. Near Pistoia she lives. Even my old eyes exulted at the whiteness of her throat.

SISTER MADDALENA (*pressing her hand to her heart*). O new web of guilt! O Florence!

BARDI (*exultantly*). Bianca delle Torre; remember, Sister, Bianca delle Torre. And when Bianca Cappello lies stark and cold and the other Bianca reigns in her stead, remember it was old Bardi who carried the first love-token.

SISTER MADDALENA (*her face becoming as one who thinks out a problem*). To plead with her. Near Pistoia. And I go there today to see His Holiness.

BARDI (*catching eagerly at the word*). Pistoia. Yes, yes. She lives there in Castle delle Torre. Tell her of old Bardi. Tell her old Bardi is fallen on evil days—is ill—is dying—tell her ——

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SISTER MADDALENA. And you would take bread from such as she? O unreverend white hairs! O corrupted heart!

(Marianna, who has entered with more flowers and stolen nearer, utters an exclamation and drops her roses. Sister Maddalena hurries toward her.)

SISTER MADDALENA. Marianna!

MARIANNA *(covering her face with her hands)*. O Sister Maddalena!

SISTER MADDALENA *(to the poor women)*. Go, now, and the Holy Virgin keep you. *(They crowd about her, kissing her hands and the hem of her robe. She turns to Bardi.)*

SISTER MADDALENA. Your days are few. Even now the sword hangs over Florence. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," saith the Lord. Go. Forget. Forgive. Repent.

(One of the servants opens the gate. The throng flocks out. Sister Maddalena turns to Marianna, with outstretched arms, the remoteness hovering about her all gone, and a thrilling tenderness in her voice.)

SISTER MADDALENA *(to Marianna)*. In the dress of a boy! O my lost lamb!

MARIANNA. No, Sister, not lost. O Sister, it was so long, so long since I had heard from him.

SISTER MADDALENA. From Lorenzo?

MARIANNA. Who else is there! O Sister, my heart was breaking and I came to Florence to find him!

SISTER MADDALENA. Left your peaceful mountain hamlet for this great, evil place! Yes, I traced you nearly to the city gates.

MARIANNA. You came to find me?

SISTER MADDALENA. As the shepherd the strayed lamb. *(She throws a fold of her mantle about Marianna and lifting her*

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face gazes searchingly into it. Her own clears as she does so.) Praise be to the Saints!

MARIANNA. For what, Sister? Why do you search my eyes?

SISTER MADDALENA. Unspotted from the world! (*She kisses Marianna on the forehead.*) And now you will come with me.

MARIANNA. O Sister, not yet!

SISTER MADDALENA. Yes, now. I must make haste to Pistoia this very night. His Holiness is there. I must see him and beg help for Florence.

MARIANNA. For the famine?

SISTER MADDALENA. For the plague which will smite her before these flowers have withered on their stalks.

MARIANNA (*tearing herself away*). Then I will stay, for if Lorenzo should come to Florence and no one to nurse him! O Holy Virgin!

SISTER MADDALENA. This is no place for you.

MARIANNA. O Sister, wait, wait! Give me one little half-hour more. A reverend father I know has letters from Lorenzo. Let me hear first if he is alive or dead.

SISTER MADDALENA. There is a dying woman in the next street, holding on to life till I come to her. I cannot wait.

MARIANNA. Go, go and leave me here a little half-hour, and when you come back I will follow you. O Sister, if you knew what it was to love, you would have mercy on me!

SISTER MADDALENA (*half to herself*). This little earthly love, this possession of a few moments! Oh, if you could hear the voice I once heard, long years ago, at the blessed Eastertide, here in the cathedral!

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MARIANNA. What voice, Sister?

SISTER MADDALENA (*her eyes growing rapt*). Of an angel, not a man. One to whom I owe every hope of my salvation.

MARIANNA. You loved him?

SISTER MADDALENA. His soul spoke to mine and mine leapt to life. (*She flings out her arms with sudden burning fervor.*)

O Lord, if it be not a sinful desire of self, grant, grant that I may yet in the flesh once more behold him, fall at his holy feet, and bathe them with tears of thanksgiving! (*She stands rapt a moment; then the fire dies from her eyes, and she turns with her former calm to Marianna.*)

I will return for you soon.

MARIANNA. I will be at the gate, Sister.

(*Sister Maddalena goes out. Marianna closes the gate.*

The servants attempt to arrange the disordered table.)

FIRST SERVANT. But why were you fool enough to let her in?

SECOND SERVANT. It was the Count's fault. He should have driven her out.

FIRST SERVANT. There they come now and his Reverence with them.

(*Enter from the convent Count Salviati, Sir Walter, and the Abbot in the white robe of his order.*)

ABBOT (*laughing*). Devoured your feast before your very eyes, you say? But where is the rabble?

COUNT SALVIATI. Gone!

ABBOT. And half the plate, too, I dare swear, hid in the chaste bosom of the holy sister of St. Francis.

SIR WALTER. But if you could have seen her!

ABBOT. Pah! I know the unwashed tribe. (*He takes a rose from the table and smells it, delicately.*)

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COUNT SALVIATI. If you could have heard her!

ABBOT. A mere trick of the trade. I held it myself once, for an hour, and preached an Easter sermon yonder in the cathedral, that brought all Florence to its knees.

COUNT SALVIATI. Who has not heard of your Reverence's great sermon?

ABBOT. And the women,—you should have heard the sobs of the women!

COUNT SALVIATI. I prefer their smiles.

ABBOT. And then the Archbishop clapt this fat abbey into my mouth and I am (*shrugging his shoulders*)—your very good companion. But, *per Bacco!* our fair guests have left us but scant pickings.

COUNT SALVIATI (*hurling his flagons on the ground*). Pestiferous wretches!

ABBOT. Here, boy, run to Brother Gregorius and bid him give you my gold cups, Cellini's work. He will know.

MARIANNA. Yes, Reverend Father. (*She goes out through the abbey gate. The Abbot looks after her. It is manifest that the evident simplicity and purity of the supposed boy are, though perhaps unconsciously to the Abbot, touching the best side of his nature. With her his worldliness, his cynicism half drop from him.*)

ABBOT (*looking after her*). Country-bred, sirs, and smacking still of the fields. A pretty something in his eyes, we used to call innocence.

COUNT SALVIATI. Still, I think I should keep an eye to the key of my strong-box. (*To the servants.*) Fresh wine and fruit.

(*The servants go out. The others seat themselves.*)

ABBOT (*to Sir Walter, handing him a paper*). This came in Lorenzo's packet.

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SIR WALTER. By your leave. (*He goes apart and reads the paper.*)

ABBOT (*to Count Salviati*). That troublesome ward of mine, Lorenzo Tornabuoni, whom I sent to England to cure of a love folly —

COUNT SALVIATI. Yes, I have heard.

ABBOT. Well, cured or not cured, he is on his way home.

COUNT SALVIATI. Have you tried the old cure, "Like cures like?"

ABBOT. Not in his case.

(*Enter Marianna with a salver, bearing three superb golden goblets.*)

COUNT SALVIATI. I know a lady who would cure your ward of his love-sickness.

ABBOT. Who is she?

COUNT SALVIATI. You should know. Is she not near kin to you? Bianca delle Torre.

ABBOT. My very own fair cousin.

COUNT SALVIATI. Then Lorenzo knows her already?

ABBOT. No, they have never met.

COUNT SALVIATI. Let her physic his wound.

ABBOT. Poor boy. (*His brow clouds.*)

COUNT SALVIATI. Has he had many such troublesome loves, this Lorenzo of yours?

(*Marianna makes a half-smothered exclamation, and drops one of the goblets.*)

ABBOT (*turning suddenly*). Have a care, boy. (*He hands one of the cups to the Count.*) But, indeed, this is cunning goldsmith's work. Cellini's. Were ever Cupid and Psyche modeled more graciously?

COUNT SALVIATI. Admirable.

(*Sir Walter comes to the Count with a paper. The*

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Count exclaims and turns to the Abbot who is lazily playing with some strawberries.) By your leave. (*Reads the paper.*)

ABBOT (*with a gracious motion of his hand*). So that it does not spoil your palate for this fruit. Here, Gabriello, let me see which are ripest, these berries, or your lips. (*Gabriello kneels before the Abbot, who takes a berry and puts it between her lips.*) The king of the dish. Am I not a generous master, Gabriello? When you go from me to another master, and they say evil things of me, tell them, "Ah, but he always gave me the largest berries in the dish."

MARIANNA. No one should ever say evil things of you in my hearing.

ABBOT (*turning up her face, half curiously, half carelessly*). Why, how the child flushes! What a curious light you have in your eyes, Gabriello; for all the world like—where have I seen it before? (*His gaze leaves her face. He draws a long breath.*) On the morning hills, the light, the radiance——

MARIANNA. What light, Reverend Father?

ABBOT (*musings*). 'Tis years since I have thought myself back there.

MARIANNA. Where, Reverend Father?

ABBOT. Have you ever been in the hills, Gabriello, the real mountains? Ah, yes, you came from there.

MARIANNA. I have always lived there.

ABBOT. But I lived in Venice. To be content with this world, Gabriello, live on the plains. No mystifying hints of half-seen, cloud-capped phantasmagoria, that dazzle the eye from a mountain peak. There, never try to understand. Taste this berry.

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MARIANNA. Perhaps I do not understand, but oh, I love to hear you.

ABBOT (*forgetting Gabriello*). Ah, the wild life there in Venice! How the blood ran riot in our veins! Was I ever once alone in my life, till I left my father's palace? What took me to the hills? Up, up I climbed, half the night, then turned and saw—my God, what did I not see! (*He rises, oblivious of everything about him.*) Early morning, the sun not yet risen, a hush, a purity—how the world seemed to fall away! The light in the sky! It seemed to stab me with ineffable joy and agony! Prayers surged to my lips——

COUNT SALVIATI (*looking up from his papers*). What are we losing? A tale from the Decameron?

ABBOT (*with a sudden bitter laugh*). A fairy tale to amuse Gabriello. (*He throws himself down on his seat, his old careless manner upon him.*)

MARIANNA (*with wide eyes*). And then, and then?

ABBOT. Never go to the hills, boy; they turn the heads of honest folk. Or, yes, go to them, get mad, renounce the world, turn monk, take holy orders, preach a sermon of blood and tears, draw a rich abbey and—live happy ever after.

MARIANNA (*shaking her head sadly*). You are telling it differently now.

ABBOT (*cynically*). Yes, now it is a tale from Boccaccio. (*He pushes her lightly away. Sir Walter comes forward hastily.*)

SIR WALTER. Pardon, I must leave at once for Pistoia. I am to meet Lorenzo tonight at Castle delle Torre.

ABBOT. What, is my pretty cousin Bianca dabbling in the English plot? (*To Count Salviati.*) Providence puts Lorenzo in her hands.

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SIR WALTER (*reading from his letter*). "The Pope is in Pistoia. Lorenzo has audience of His Holiness."

COUNT SALVIATI (*tapping Sir Walter on the breast*). Let me warn you, if you have audience of His Holiness, leave behind you the staunch little friend I see there.

SIR WALTER (*drawing out a pistol*). This?

COUNT SALVIATI. Very pretty, but not to be carried in Papal presence.

ABBOT. Why not?

COUNT SALVIATI. A new edict, and when Sixtus speaks——

ABBOT. This comes of the two attempts on his life.

COUNT SALVIATI. Yes, and now whoever approaches him armed, dies.

ABBOT (*starting up with sudden emotion*). Does Lorenzo know this?

(*Marianna clasps her hands. Enter Brother Sebastiano from the convent, breathless and trembling.*)

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. Reverend Father!

ABBOT. Well.

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. Reverend Father!

ABBOT. Out with it!

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. It has reached the next village.

ABBOT. What, your face? It is long enough.

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. The pestilence!

(*Count Salviati and Sir Walter start and rise. The Abbot alone keeps his coolness.*)

COUNT SALVIATI. Reached San Marino!

SIR WALTER. Come with me to Pistoia.

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. The Holy Virgin herself has been seen in the streets of Florence, clad all in gray, like a sister of St. Francis.

SIR WALTER. Our fanatic.

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ABBOT. Bravo, Count, it was the Queen of Heaven you entertained unawares.

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. And prophesies death and destruction to Florence for her sins.

ABBOT. I pray you, gentlemen, repent and save the city.

BROTHER SEBASTIANO (*to the Abbot*). O Reverend Father, if I thought my sins, my heinous sins——

ABBOT. What! you have been tripping?

BROTHER SEBASTIANO (*wringing his hands*). A thousand times have I sworn to abstain!

ABBOT (*gaily to Count Salviati and Sir Walter*). Listen, gentlemen, a confession! For this sinner is Florence smitten!

COUNT SALVIATI. Then we go free.

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. But the saints having as it were thrust the key into my hands (*he draws out a large key*)—— I found it on the chapel floor——

ABBOT. Ah, whom the very saints tempt!

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. And my voice never sounds so clear——your Reverence himself praised it one day at matins——as when my stomach is warm.

ABBOT. I——at matins? A miracle!

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. And so, year after year, O Reverend Father——

ABBOT. So you were the leak! and it is my Burgundy that has been ripening your nose these ten years?

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. Saints forgive me! But Brother Gregorius——

ABBOT. Keep to your own sins.

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. If the pestilence spare me to do penance!

ABBOT. The Burgundy I forgive you, but not your solitary

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guzzlings. What the devil do you think the blessed saints thrust this temptation under your nose for, but to see if you were good fellow enough to invite the whole convent into my cellar and warm their fasting hearts?

BROTHER SEBASTIANO (*deeply perplexed*). Your Reverence knows more of the ways of the blessed saints than I!

(*Enter Brother Filipo, wringing his hands.*)

BROTHER FILIPO. Lost! All lost! The plague is on us!

In San Marino every soul is stricken with death (*telling his beads*). O Holy Virgin, have mercy, have mercy! Remember not my sins, O Lord!

ABBOT. Fool! Coward!

(*A confused murmur of voices is heard. The convent gate is burst open and a stream of brothers all in the white robes of the Order of St. Benedict pour into the garden.*)

BROTHERS (*incoherently*). The pestilence! Death! Florence doomed! The gray sister!

ABBOT (*lifting his arm with a strong, commanding gesture*).

Silence! (*He glances over the trembling throng and speaks half in scorn, as though answering his own bitter thoughts.*)

And yet you are what I have made you, and now it is too late! (*A mocking light comes into his face.*) No, she is not a pleasant bed-fellow, my lady Pestilence, and why should I ask you to lie with her when I will not? Does not her mere breath on your cheek chill your heart's blood! Those trembling hands to tend the dying! Those pallid lips to whisper courage! What have I ever given you that you could give again! Come, then, we who are afraid to die, out of the pest-house, out of the death-trap! Who goes? Who stays?

BROTHERS (*crowding about him*). Take me—and me—I go—I go!

THE TOCSIN

ABBOT (*recklessly and lifting a glass*). To Castle delle Torre, then, to the pure breath of the Apennines and — a health to my lady Pestilence (*the monks shudder and cross themselves*), and may she keep us long from our duties!



ACT II

A lofty hall in Castle delle Torre. At one side is a wide marble fireplace and before it a table set with glasses. Enter Nita, followed by a pouting page. He carries an elaborately wrought jewel-box and a wreath of roses.

PAGE. To make a messenger of the Grand Duke, Francesco de' Medici, cool his heels all day in the ante-room!

NITA (*glancing cautiously about and fingering the lid of the jewel-box*). Just one little peep.

PAGE (*pushing her hand away*). No.

NITA. How does it open? Ah, you do not know. I see your master does not trust you, and, indeed, why should he?

PAGE. Not trust me? See, you have only to press the cherub's head and — (*As he does so the lid flies open.*)

NITA (*clasping her hands*). *Angeli santi!* A coronet of rubies, blood red! Oh, to wear such a coronet!

PAGE (*disdainfully lifting the wreath and placing it on her head*). These are for such as you.

NITA (*uttering a cry and putting up her hands*). The thorns, the thorns! Blessed saints! it has made my forehead

THE TOCSIN

bleed! (*She snatches it off, the petals falling as she handles it.*) One more little peep at the jewels, to pay me for those cruel thorns.

(*Their heads are together over the box, when a curtain is pulled noiselessly back and Sister Maddalena, worn and exhausted, enters. She stands watching the pair silently and with drawn brows.*)

PAGE. Well, then, only you must not touch.

NITA. The cherub head, the laughing one! He may well laugh. Oh, let me press it! (*Sister Maddalena draws a long breath as the jewel-box flies open.*) Who was it sighed? (*Turning and perceiving the Sister.*) *Angeli santi!* (*She starts away from the page.*)

SISTER MADDALENA (*to the page*). You wear the livery of the Medici.

NITA (*falling on her knees*). The Holy Sister Maddalena! On your knees, Sandro!

PAGE (*standing erect and looking arrogantly at the Sister*). I have a message for the Countess from my master.

NITA (*pulling his cloak*). Hst, the Holy Sister! Hst,—*Ora pro nobis!* Your blessing, Holy Sister!

SISTER MADDALENA. I, too, have a message for the Countess from my Master. (*She catches her breath and puts her hand to her throat.*) The saints grant me strength to deliver it! (*She sways and supports herself against the table.*)

NITA. O Sister, your bleeding feet!

SISTER MADDALENA (*indifferently*). Do they bleed? I have come far.

NITA. Let me bind them up for you. O Sister, you tremble! (*She rises and supports Sister Maddalena.*) Let me get you some wine.

SISTER MADDALENA. A cup of water. My throat is

THE TOCSIN

parched. The fountain I passed in the court; let me rest a moment. O Lord, thy vessels of clay —

NITA. Lean on me, Sister.

(Sister Maddalena goes out, supported by Nita. The page shrugs his shoulders and busies himself with his wreath.)

PAGE. Half fallen to pieces. Ah, some one is coming. The Countess. *(He smoothes his ruffles. Enter a servant, throwing open the doors.)*

SERVANT. His Highness's messenger awaits the Contessa's pleasure.

(Enter Bianca delle Torre.)

BIANCA *(waving her hand indifferently toward the casket)*.

On the table, there! You may go.

PAGE *(presenting a letter)*. His Highness hoped I might have the honor of a return message.

BIANCA. Come for it in three days.

PAGE. At the Countess's service. *(He bows and goes out.)*

BIANCA *(going to the casket and opening it)*. Ah! *(She takes out a coronet.)* This—and the title of Marchioness—if I choose *(she takes out other jewels)*, and if the Grand Duchess—if Bianca Cappello should die—he raised her to a throne, why not me? The “infamous Bianca,” men called her. Now this strange wasting illness she has. Bianca—Bianca de' Medici. *(She puts the jewels back and closes the casket, then touches a bell on the table. No one comes. She touches it again impatiently, then again angrily.)* What does this mean! Where are my people! *(She strikes the bell again more angrily. Enter Nita breathless.)*

NITA. Pardon, my lady!

BIANCA. How often am I to ring?

NITA. A thousand pardons, gracious lady! I heard and I could not stir—the Holy Sister!

THE TOCSIN

BIANCA. What holy sister?

NITA. In the courtyard, gracious lady, the Holy Sister Maddalena and the whole household on its knees and the blessed saint warning us of death and purgatory——

BIANCA. What nonsense is this?

NITA (*crossing herself*). The gracious lady has only to open the casement and look. (*Volubly.*) Even old Josefe who buried his three sons dry-eyed is all tears. And when she speaks every one must listen whether one would or no. And see, *Contessa*, I myself tore off my bracelet, the one your Excellency gave me, and cast it at her feet (*holding up her wrist remorsefully*). Bare as my poor arm looks without it, may the saints reward me!

BIANCA. Foolish child! (*Giving her a ring from her finger.*) Here—lest the saints forget.

NITA (*kissing Bianca's hand*). O *Contessa*, a thousand thanks!

BIANCA. What is the Sister doing here?

NITA. On her way to Pistoia, blessed saint, to see His Holiness; she stopped here for a cup of water and to bind up her feet—St. Agnes, how they bled! She will be gone now—and my bracelet with her.

BIANCA. I should like to see old Josefe in tears.

NITA. And miracles she can work, my lady, and tell the future——

BIANCA (*suddenly*). Tell the future!

NITA. And has visions, holy saint that she is!

BIANCA. Call her up—run after her if she is gone. Quick!

NITA. Yes, my lady. (*Exit.*)

BIANCA. See into the future! They say these strange creatures, with their mortifications of the flesh, can do that. If I knew! If the stake were worth the playing——

THE TOCSIN

(*She stands musing, her hand on the casket; then goes to the casement and opens it.*) Yes, there they all are still, but rising from their knees and already repenting their repentance.

(*Enter Nita throwing open the door.*)

NITA. Sister Maddalena. (*Exit.*)

(*The Sister comes forward with a calm dignity but with searching eyes on Bianca's face.*)

SISTER MADDALENA. My time is short.

BIANCA. They say you have strange gifts.

SISTER MADDALENA. That is as Heaven wills.

BIANCA. I would know—there is one—a—a friend stricken with a wasting sickness——

SISTER MADDALENA. You speak of Bianca Cappello.

BIANCA (*starting*). I had not named her.

SISTER MADDALENA. I will join my prayers with yours that she may recover.

BIANCA (*hastily aside*). Heaven forbid! (*To the Sister.*) I fear my prayers would avail little.

SISTER MADDALENA. Nothing is denied the earnest and suppliant heart.

BIANCA. But Heaven may have a higher crown for her. (*Takes a jewel from her breast.*) For your poor. (*The Sister steps back, sternly waving off Bianca's hand.*) And twice this in gold. Tell me, must Florence again mourn its Grand Duchess?

SISTER MADDALENA (*in a sudden fervor of passion*). O Florence! O my city! Not yet purged from the pollution of that adulterous marriage, and now again to be smitten for its ruler's shame! Strike, strike, O avenging pestilence! Stay not thy hand till the abomination be scourged from off the earth.

THE TOCSIN

BIANCA. Woman!

SISTER MADDALENA. Where is that voice long dumb—
that clarion voice that called me from my sin? O Lord,
how long!

BIANCA. Go!

SISTER MADDALENA (*pointing to Bianca with a fierce fire in
her eyes before which she sways back as if from a flame*).
You and such as you it is that call down God's wrath in
the fiery darts of the pestilence! You that walk in high
places! You that wear purple and fine linen!

(*Bianca, her hand on her breast, and her eyes fixed on
Sister Maddalena, flies to the doors and throws them back.*)

BIANCA. Bernardo! Giorgio!

SISTER MADDALENA. Too long has the Lord held His
hand.

(*Enter servants.*)

BIANCA (*pointing to Sister Maddalena and with her proud
manner again upon her*). The woman! Drive her from
the gates! (*The servants recoil and look in perturbation at
each other.*)

SISTER MADDALENA (*to the servants*). Have no fear. You
obey a higher voice than hers.

BIANCA. Bernardo!

SISTER MADDALENA (*to servants*). Go. I shall follow. (*They
go out. She turns to Bianca with outstretched arms, the
anger gone, and her voice tender and beseeching.*) And yet
I know how it is with you. Never dream I do not know.
I too once slept soft and knew the life of courts and was
beautiful. I too lived in the fleeting moment, and was
blind and knew it not. Then a light smote me. Then a
hand plucked me from the abyss as I would pluck you.
It is not yet too late. Christ's bosom is so tender.

THE TOCSIN

Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Come! (*Bianca turns away. The Sister stands with outstretched arms.*) You will not? You shut your ears to my voice? Oh, if I could but stay and plead with you! But my dying people call. (*Sister Maddalena advances to the table, laying her hand on the casket, her voice thrilling with an almost unearthly solemnity.*) Not chance it was brought me to you. Two messengers have come to you today, one from an earthly prince, one from the Lord High God of Hosts. To which word will you give ear? (*She points to the wreath.*) See, the chaplet of roses, twined by carnal love, already fades. (*She lifts up the garland. The withered petals fall in a rosy shower, leaving a ring of leaves and thorns.*) A chaplet of roses, did I call it? Behold, it is a crown of thorns! (*Bianca shrinks back, clasping her hands on her breast. The two women stand gazing into each other's eyes, Bianca's spirit battling with the solemn inspiration of Sister Maddalena's. Suddenly a smile of ineffable sweetness and triumph flashes across the Sister's face.*) O blessed crown of thorns! Yet shall you wear it! Yet shall you come! My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Maker! (*She turns silently and goes out.*)

BIANCA (*half starting after her*). Sister — I — (*She checks herself and gazes about as if trying to shake off some powerful impression.*) What did she say? Yet should I come? I? I? — The crown of thorns! And scorned me in my own palace and I was dumb! And knew of whom I questioned and of my sin! Fool! she had met de' Medici's messenger — or perhaps by this it is common talk. Fool that I am!

(*Enter servant.*)

THE TOCSIN

SERVANT. A messenger from Florence, from his Reverence the Abbot of San Raffaello.

BIANCA. Bring him in.

(*Enter Marianna and Brother Sebastiano.*)

BIANCA (*to Marianna*). Well, pretty boy!

MARIANNA. The Reverend Father is at the gate.

BIANCA. Why at the gate? Run and fetch him in.

MARIANNA. The Reverend Father bade me say the plague is not yet in Florence. We bring no contagion, but every hour it creeps nearer, and so——

BIANCA. So he makes haste to our pure mountain air. A thousand welcomes to him! Run child and tell him.

MARIANNA. But his Reverence is not alone.

BIANCA. Whom has he with him?

MARIANNA. Sir Walter Howard, Count Salviati and half the convent, gracious lady.

BIANCA. The more the merrier. (*She turns up Marianna's face and strokes her cheek.*) I prefer you to old shaven pate there. Now run. (*Exeunt Marianna and Brother Sebastiano. Bianca turns to the servant.*) Has the Grand Duke's messenger gone?

SERVANT. Yes, my lady.

(*She goes to the table and stands brooding, her hand on the casket. Enter a servant, throwing open the door.*)

SERVANT. His Reverence, the Abbot of San Raffaello!

(*Enter the Abbot, followed by a train of monks.*)

ABBOT (*kissing Bianca's hand*). My fair cousin.

BIANCA. Welcome.

ABBOT (*laughing*). And all my white lambs?

BIANCA. Every one.

ABBOT. Poor devils, they were no more eager than was their shepherd, to lie down with the lion.

THE TOCSIN

BIANCA. And the Count and Sir Walter?

ABBOT. Stopping to shake the dust from their fineries.

BIANCA. I warrant you made good time from Florence.

ABBOT. Yes, each for himself and the devil take the hindmost, though never dream *his* name was mentioned! Such a pattering of aves and paternosters you never heard.

BIANCA. I can fancy it!

ABBOT. By the mass, I had forgotten we could boast so much pious learning among us.

BIANCA. And you rode on Saladin?

ABBOT. Yes, I—or rather Brother Sebastiano there. Remorse had made him faint.

BIANCA. And you rode——

ABBOT. Shanks' mare. Not another to be had for love or money.

BIANCA. What! you all this way on foot?

ABBOT. Brother Sebastiano is but an indifferent horseman.

I found it wise to have an occasional hand on the bridle.

BIANCA. All those miles! (*She pours wine for him.*)

ABBOT. And when the paternosters flagged, I kept up the brothers' hearts by tales from Boccaccio——

BIANCA. Are those in your breviary?

ABBOT. Which, to tell the truth, when Gabriello's eyes were on me I softened a bit. But such a searching of hearts as we had before leaving Florence!

BIANCA. A conversion?

ABBOT. Hidden iniquities brought to light! Secret sins! The plague turned us inside out as a pickpocket a rifled purse.

BIANCA. Even you?

ABBOT. On tiptoe for the confessional. But as a lover of

THE TOCSIN

fair ladies, Bianca, let me warn you to avoid repentance. It spoils the complexion. Brother Sebastiano has not got his color yet.

BIANCA. I will take warning.

ABBOT (*touching her cheek lightly*). A suspicion of pallor?

BIANCA. It is nothing.

ABBOT. No teasing imp of remorse, I trust, concerning pilfered Burgundy, or—a neighbor's husband?

BIANCA (*turning hastily to a servant*). I am forgetting these good brothers. Give them food and wine. (*Exeunt the monks.*)

ABBOT. Do you harbor a nunnery here? What was that gray shadow that flitted past us as we came in?

BIANCA. A sister of St. Francis.

ABBOT. Ugh. The mere sweep of her robe chilled me to the bone. Her face was as white as her coif. Poor fool, I dare swear she has not tasted meat this twelvemonth.

(*Enter Marianna. She goes to the Abbot and hands him a large, gold watch.*)

MARIANNA. Your Reverence.

ABBOT. What? I left the friend of my bosom behind me?

MARIANNA. Brother Angelo rode after us with it.

ABBOT. I would as lief lose my mitre.

BIANCA. And do these curious little toys really keep the time?

ABBOT. Why, Bianca, there is a saying in Florence, "True as the Abbot's watch." Gabriello, you shall hear some time how I came by it, and of my great sermon, and make round eyes as you do at my tales. Why, boy—
(*A heavy bell from outside rings sharply.*) Hark!

BIANCA. The courtyard bell! (*The bell sounds again clamorously.*) What can that mean?

THE TOCSIN

MARIANNA. Brother Angelo said he saw a troop of armed men riding this way post-haste.

ABBOT. Bernardo must be calling your men-at-arms together. (*Going toward the door.*) I will see what it means.

BIANCA. The country is thick with marauders.

(*As the Abbot reaches the door it is flung violently open and Lorenzo, escorted by two soldiers of the Papal Guard, rushes in. Marianna half starts toward him, then draws back.*)

ABBOT. Lorenzo!

LORENZO. You here, Reverend Father!

ABBOT. And you, under Papal guard!

LORENZO. Where is Sir Walter Howard? I have papers for him. I am under sentence of death.

(*The Abbot with an inarticulate cry of horror throws one arm about Lorenzo's shoulder.*)

BIANCA. Death!

LORENZO. I had audience with His Holiness, private letters to deliver. In reaching for them in my bosom a loaded pistol fell to the ground.

ABBOT (*with a cry of anguish*). My boy!

BIANCA. Ah, the new edict!

LORENZO. Yes, death to carry loaded weapons in the presence of His Holiness.

ABBOT. But this is not Papal territory. Surely the Grand Duke——

LORENZO. The Grand Duke was there and confirmed the decree.

ABBOT. My God!

LORENZO. Where is Sir Walter? I am alive for an hour only. This packet I have sworn on the Holy Sacrament to deliver into his hands.

THE TOCSIN

BIANCA. And then?

LORENZO. Shot.

(The deep emotion which appeared almost to overwhelm the Abbot gives place to a controlled composure. He speaks rapidly but as a man with all his senses quickened and calmed by the necessity for action.)

ABBOT *(to a servant)*. Call Sir Walter. *(Exit the servant. The Abbot turns to Lorenzo.)* How many men have you? *(Lorenzo goes to the door and opens it silently, disclosing a row of armed men.)* And this castle musters—see, the window ledge and the ivy will take you down. We can master these two men silently—then——

LORENZO. My word.

ABBOT. Child's play.

LORENZO. I swore it.

ABBOT. A curse on your woman's breeding! I am your father confessor; I absolve you. I will swear to Sixtus I forced you.

LORENZO. And answer for it with your life! *(Enter Sir Walter.)* Ah, Sir Walter! *(He draws him apart.)*

BIANCA *(opening a curtained recess)*. You can be private here.

(Lorenzo, Sir Walter and the guards enter the recess. Bianca closes the curtain. Marianna remains in the background.)

ABBOT *(to Bianca)*. A forlorn hope, but I will post to Pistoia, see His Holiness——

BIANCA. Are you in such favor there?

ABBOT. Bad odor enough, with my lax rule. *(Hurries to the door.)*

BIANCA *(following and detaining him)*. I know a better way. The Grand Duke——

THE TOCSIN

ABBOT (*turning eagerly*). Ah!

BIANCA. Sixtus sups tonight with the Grand Duke. He desires of all things to keep friendship with Florence. I will ask Lorenzo's life of the Grand Duke!

ABBOT (*seizing her hand with a burst of hope*). And when Bianca sues——

(*Marianna, breathless, steals unobserved nearer.*)

BIANCA. One of the brothers shall take my message.

MARIANNA (*starting forward and clutching the Abbot's robe*).

No—I—I will take the message!

ABBOT (*seizing Marianna roughly*). Eavesdropping!

MARIANNA (*sinking her eyes*). When it concerns the fate of one you love!

BIANCA. Is the boy to be trusted?

MARIANNA. Yes, yes! O gracious lady, they rescued me from death at the abbey. (*Turning to the Abbot again.*)

Trust me, trust me! O Reverend Father, let me go!

BIANCA. The boy's face will be a passport. (*The Abbot rings a bell for a servant.*) Here, child (*to Marianna, drawing off a ring*), post to the palace, demand entrance. Insist this ring shall reach the hands of the Grand Duke. He will see you. Say to him, "Bianca delle Torre asks her first favor of Francesco de' Medici—the life of her cousin's ward, Lorenzo Tornabuoni," and here—— (*Bianca goes to the table and writes a few lines, Marianna standing by.*)

ABBOT (*to servant who enters*). Bernardo and five of his men shall ride with this boy to Pistoia. A hundred gold pieces to each if they are back before the hour. Now Gabriello—laggard—off, off! (*Exeunt Marianna and servant.*)

BIANCA. Who is the boy?

THE TOCSIN

ABBOT. Brother Sebastiano picked him up more dead than alive by the roadside. He is country bred, that is all I know. I have had him by me and he seems to cling to me in a dumb way.

BIANCA. He found speech tonight.

ABBOT (*as the clock strikes*). Ah! that must be mended. (*He sets back the hands of the clock.*) Too fast by a half-hour.

BIANCA. But there are other clocks on the castle.

ABBOT. Then make them tell the same tale.

BIANCA. That is soon done. (*Exit Bianca.*)

ABBOT (*opening the window, through which comes a rapid clatter of hoofs*). There they go! There's Gabriello! Why, the boy is mad. The mare can never keep that pace. (*The clatter grows fainter.*) Five minutes to the city gate, three to the palace, then delays, delays! Out of sight now, behind the cypresses.

(*Enter Bianca.*)

BIANCA (*pointing to the recess*). Still closeted with Sir Walter?

ABBOT. Those cursèd plots! And it was I got the boy into this coil!

BIANCA (*seating herself*). Surely you have no interest in Mary of Scotland?

ABBOT. I sent Lorenzo out of the country to keep him from an act of folly. What piece of womanhood do you think he was mad to marry?

BIANCA. His mistress—like the Grand Duke?

ABBOT. Why, the boy is an anchorite. No, a peasant girl, a *contadina* off his estates here in the Apennines. Marry, I say!

BIANCA. Is he simple?

THE TOCSIN

ABBOT. Was I not, to let him follow his bent and grow up in that mountain tower of his with peasants and holy sisters as his companions? (*He seats himself near Bianca.*)

BIANCA (*starting*). What holy sisters?

ABBOT. You have heard of Sister Maddalena?

BIANCA. She again!

ABBOT. Lorenzo first came under her spell and was all for the cloister, but now it is marriage and his *contadina*. In that Arcadia, you see, they still believe in God and love.

BIANCA. Perhaps at his age you too held love worthy of a shrine.

ABBOT. Of a shrine, yes; of worship, yes; of belief, hardly.

BIANCA. Subtle distinction for the brain of a woman.

ABBOT. Do I not worship your proud eyes, but, pardon me, do I believe in them?

BIANCA. A little more belief and they might have proved worthier.

ABBOT. Is belief so potent a god? Come, let us believe in one another and be saints instead of sinners. (*He rises and goes to the window, then returns.*) Countess!

BIANCA. Cousin!

ABBOT. What all England failed to do, you can.

BIANCA. What is that?

ABBOT. Win me my boy away from this folly.

BIANCA. I?

ABBOT. A glance, a smile, a what you will, and in the dip of a swallow's wing, he is yours.

BIANCA. And the little peasant maid?

ABBOT. I will send her a pair of earrings.

BIANCA (*with sudden passion*). And why do you choose me for this? Do you think there are not enough of you

THE TOCSIN

men about me fawning and flattering and lying, but I must stoop to your devil's work?

ABBOT. Well, let it lie. Let the boy marry his coarse-skinned beauty. What does it matter?

BIANCA (*bitterly*). Yes, what does it matter? He will forget her in time. As well now as then.

ABBOT. Then I can count on you?

BIANCA. I am weary of it all!

ABBOT. Still, if he lives, you will help me. (*He goes to the window and opens it. A faint sound of distant bells is heard.*) Hark! the bells of Pistoia striking the hour.

(*Enter the Captain of the Papal Guard and his men. The Abbot hastily closes the window.*)

CAPTAIN. The prisoner.

(*Enter from the recess two guards, Lorenzo and Sir Walter.*)

ABBOT (*pointing to the clock*). Not yet—the clock is not yet on the hour.

CAPTAIN. The cathedral chimes are striking. Your clock is slow.

BIANCA. Pardon me, sir, this clock is absolutely true.

CAPTAIN. But the cathedral chimes——

ABBOT. It was the quarter you heard. But there are other clocks in the castle. Send one of your men to verify this.

CAPTAIN. I will go myself.

BIANCA. And I will show you the way.

CAPTAIN. You honor me, gracious lady. (*Exeunt Bianca, Sir Walter and Captain. The soldiers take their station by the door. The Abbot and Lorenzo come forward.*)

LORENZO (*giving him a packet*). For Sister Maddalena.

ABBOT. Where is the sister?

THE TOCSIN

LORENZO. Wherever death is busiest; and this (*giving the Abbot another packet*), you will send a trusty messenger with this to Marianna—O Father! (*Turns away.*)

ABBOT. Why, courage, my boy.

LORENZO. And now to make my peace with Heaven!

ABBOT. You are not going to Heaven yet.

LORENZO. To the chapel. The Holy Sacrament, Reverend Father, before I die.

ABBOT. Die? Why, faint heart, there is a friend even now pleading for you with His Holiness.

LORENZO. Sister Maddalena?

ABBOT. Francesco de' Medici.

LORENZO. He is no friend of mine.

ABBOT. No, but of our Countess. She has sent a messenger to beg your life.

LORENZO. Why should de' Medici do her that grace? Is it true then that she ——

ABBOT. Hush! Ask why of a woman? Come, lift up your head and gloriously embrace your life when it comes back to you.

LORENZO. The gift of a wanton!

(*Enter Bianca and Captain.*)

BIANCA. The clocks all tell the same tale.

CAPTAIN. With a singular uniformity.

ABBOT (*to the Captain*). Well, then, a little patience. Death will wait, and till we are ready for him, with the permission of the Countess, a cup of wine together. (*He goes with the Captain to the table by the fireplace.*)

BIANCA. Be seated, gentlemen. (*They seat themselves and talk. Lorenzo stands moodily in the foreground. Bianca goes to him. He pays no attention.*)

BIANCA. Can I do anything for you?

THE TOCSIN

LORENZO (*roughly*). You have done too much already, Countess.

BIANCA. I do not understand.

LORENZO. Can you shrive me? There is the Reverend Father at his cups, and in a half-hour I shall be dead in a ditch without bell or book.

BIANCA. Do you not see we must blind the Captain to our tampering with the clocks? Keep up hope. The pardon must come.

LORENZO. Not at this price. No, I will not touch it. I have had clean hands till now.

BIANCA. I do not follow you. Why do you turn from me? Clean hands? What do you mean? You will not speak? Not look at me? Holy saints! I hope there is nothing on your conscience that your eyes cannot meet mine.

LORENZO. (*Lifts his eyes slowly and fixes them on Bianca. She gazes back with a long direct look. They stand silent awhile.*) And yet you look——

BIANCA. Look——?

LORENZO. Why should de' Medici grant you this favor?

BIANCA. Why should he? Why? (*Turns away.*) Ah, that was why you could not look at me. By St. Agnes! I believe you were thinking evil of me.

LORENZO. Forgive me—but they say—they say——

BIANCA (*proudly*). No more. My pity for you made me blind. I forgot here in my secluded widowhood how cruelly the world may misjudge a woman.

LORENZO. I was a brute. I had not looked in your face. But now——

BIANCA. Let me tell you why the Grand Duke is kind to me.

LORENZO. No, no! Your eyes have explained all.

THE TOCSIN

BIANCA. But you shall hear me. When the Grand Duke married Bianca Cappello——

LORENZO. Do not speak of Bianca Cappello!

BIANCA. But I bear her name, Bianca—and I too am from Venice—and at the wedding pageants (I was a child then), they dressed me in white and I carried a golden casket holding a milk-white dove. And I knelt at their feet and presented the dove, but the bird flew back and nestled in my breast. And the Grand Duke was touched and asked my name, and when I said Bianca, told me for that name I should always be dear to his heart.

LORENZO. The white dove nestles still in your breast. Can you forgive me? (*He takes her hand. They move back, talking.*)

CAPTAIN (*laughing*). Very good, Reverend Father, but the time! (*He rises and looks at the clock.*)

ABBOT. But Monsignor's answer was still better. He said——

CAPTAIN. One moment, Reverend Father, that watch of your Reverence's—that famous watch they talk of in Florence, and which never lies,—has your Reverence that with you?

BIANCA (*aside to Lorenzo*). Alas, we forgot to set it back!

ABBOT (*rising and standing by chimney*). Unfortunately I left it in the monastery.

CAPTAIN. And yet as I sat by you just now I could have sworn I heard it ticking.

ABBOT (*thrusting his hand in his robe*). You are right. I forgot. Brother Angelo posted after me with it.

CAPTAIN. I have a curiosity to see one of these little bosom consciences. (*He approaches the Abbot and holds out his hand.*)

THE TOCSIN

ABBOT. With all the pleasure in the world. (*He draws the watch out and as he does so, drops it, as it were inadvertently on the marble hearth, with a crash. All start forward.*)

ABBOT. *Per Bacco!*

BIANCA. What a misfortune!

LORENZO. Your famous watch!

CAPTAIN. Most singular calamity.

ABBOT (*picking it up*). I shall have to preach another sermon.

CAPTAIN (*to Lorenzo*). Your time is short.

(*Abbot hastens to the window and opens it. Lorenzo joins him.*)

ABBOT. The moon is out again.

BIANCA (*to the Captain*). Come and sit by the fire, Signor, the night is cold.

CAPTAIN (*pointing to the clock*). Pardon me, lady.

ABBOT (*at the window*). A horse, a horse—riderless—no! the boy bent low over the saddle bow!

CAPTAIN. The prisoner will make his farewells.

(*The Abbot leans breathless out of the window. The distant clatter of horses' hoofs is heard drawing nearer. Lorenzo falls at the Abbot's feet and takes his hand. Bianca joins them and looks over the Abbot's shoulder.*)

LORENZO. Your blessing, Father.

ABBOT (*paying no attention to Lorenzo*). Past the campanile, the cypresses, now the long loop in the road. What! He leaps the wall and tears across the gorse! (*The clatter ceases.*) Brave boy! Mad boy! The mare can never take the next wall!

BIANCA. Holy Virgin, he has leapt it! (*The clatter of hoofs is heard again louder and louder. The clock begins to strike.*)

THE TOCSIN

CAPTAIN (*to the guard*). The prisoner!

(*The guard approach Lorenzo, who rises. The hoof-beats cease.*)

ABBOT. At the gate!

LORENZO. Father, your blessing. (*The guard form about Lorenzo.*)

CAPTAIN. March! (*As the clock is on the last stroke of twelve, the door is thrown open and Marianna rushes in waving a paper. Lorenzo's back is turned.*)

MARIANNA (*breathlessly and faintly*). The pardon, the pardon!

(*The Abbot snatches the paper from her.*)

ABBOT. The pardon!

(*The soldiers draw away from Lorenzo who falls at Bianca's feet and kisses her hand.*)

LORENZO. You have saved my life!

MARIANNA (*at the door*). No, I—I——

(*No one observes her. She looks at Bianca and Lorenzo, throws up her arms with a gesture of despair and hurries from the room.*)

ABBOT (*looking up from the pardon*). But the boy, Gabriello, where is he?



ACT III

A green meadow with Castle delle Torre in the background. Behind its towers rise the peaks of the Apennines. In the center is a wayside shrine to the Virgin, approached by broad stone steps and a stone platform. Sister Maddalena is kneeling at the top of the steps before the shrine. A peasant and his wife enter, leading a child, its hands full of field flowers.

PEASANT WOMAN (*to the child*). Yes, Lillo shall be lifted up in my arms and shall lay the pretty flowers himself at the feet of Madonna.

PEASANT (*pointing to Sister Maddalena*). Ah, a sister of St. Francis.

PEASANT WOMAN. Blessed saints! I know her by her worn hands! It is the Holy Sister Maddalena! (*She sinks on her knees at the bottom of the steps and pulls the child down after her.*) Look, little one! It was she saved you from death when the fever was on you.

PEASANT (*kneeling and taking off his hat*). Quiet, little one!

PEASANT WOMAN (*to her husband*). Run, Niccolo, and fetch old Bratti and the miller's daughter, that she may lay her blessed hands on them and cure them.

THE TOCSIN

PEASANT (*rising*). Well said. (*He goes out softly. The woman tells her beads, while the child, weary with kneeling, sinks into a sitting posture and plays with his flowers. Three peasant girls enter with their hoes and baskets. The woman motions to them and whispers.*)

PEASANT WOMAN. The Holy Sister Maddalena! She who saved my Lillo.

(*The girls look awestruck, and one whispers, "Ah, the holy saint!" They cross themselves and kneel. One begins softly to sing an Ave Maria, the others take it up. Sister Maddalena stirs, but still prays, kneeling. As the hymn dies away the peasant returns leading a decrepit old man and followed by a pale young girl.*)

PEASANT (*to his charges*). Here, close to the steps, so that her blessing may fall first on you.

(*They kneel. Sister Maddalena stirs, raises her hands to Heaven and rising slowly turns and looks down on the kneeling group. They gaze at her in awe. She lets her eyes rest silently and solemnly on each, standing up tall and pale in her gray Franciscan robe. Her eyes fall full of pity on old Bratti and the miller's daughter.*)

PEASANT WOMAN. Your blessing, Holy Sister.

ALL. Bless us, bless us.

SISTER MADDALENA. I can but pray for you. Heaven alone blesses.

PEASANT WOMAN (*holding up Lillo*). See, Holy Sister, the little one. He was sick to death when you passed here in the spring, and you laid your hands upon him and now he leaps like a young kid. (*Taking old Bratti's hand.*) Lay your blessed hands on this old man, Madonna.

SISTER MADDALENA (*descending the steps slowly and laying her hand on Bratti's head*). You will not suffer long.

THE TOCSIN

(*She turns to the miller's daughter.*) You should be in your bed. Where do you live?

MILLER'S DAUGHTER. In the mill yonder, Sister.

SISTER MADDALENA. Go home. I will come to you soon.

MILLER'S DAUGHTER. And stay with us, Sister?

SISTER MADDALENA. No. They need me in Florence.

ALL (*clamoring*). In Florence? O Holy Sister, the pestilence, the pestilence! You will die! Do not leave us! Do not go to Florence! (*They cluster about her, kissing her hands and the hem of her garments. She tries to prevent them.*)

SISTER MADDALENA. Not to me! Not to me!

(*Enter Marianna in peasant's dress. She falls on her knees before Sister Maddalena, who stoops and raises her tenderly.*)

SISTER MADDALENA. Marianna!

MARIANNA. O Sister, Sister!

SISTER MADDALENA (*with authority to the peasants*). Go now. (*To the miller's daughter.*) I will come to you soon. (*Exeunt all but Sister Maddalena and Marianna.*)

You promised to be at the gate.

MARIANNA. Do not reproach me. O Sister, let me lay my head on your breast, for I am sick unto death.

SISTER MADDALENA. Where is the pain, little one?

MARIANNA. Here in my heart.

SISTER MADDALENA. The Holy Virgin will comfort you.

MARIANNA (*looking up and pointing off, with a shrinking fear*). O *angeli beati*! they are here. Come away, Sister.

SISTER MADDALENA (*turning in the direction in which Marianna is pointing, and starting as with a great thrill*). The Father in white! Who is he? Who is he?

MARIANNA. The Abbot of San Raffaello. O Sister, come away!

THE TOCSIN

SISTER MADDALENA. Abbot? Simple priest, then. But he it is, none other. "O Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace!"

MARIANNA (*plucking at Sister Maddalena's robe*). Come, Sister.

SISTER MADDALENA (*unmindful of Marianna*). To speak to him before I die!

MARIANNA. Not now! O Sister, come!

SISTER MADDALENA. Wandering in green fields, and Florence dying? (*Checking herself*.) Peace! That I should dare question the ways of the Lord's anointed. Yet shall he bless me before I go! (*She starts away, oblivious of Marianna, who clings to her robe.*)

MARIANNA (*piteously*). You too forsake me?

SISTER MADDALENA. Let me go. (*She tries to unclasp Marianna's hands.*)

MARIANNA. O Sister, my heart is breaking!

SISTER MADDALENA (*in violent agitation and almost harshly*). Do not stop me. Unclasp your hands.

MARIANNA. When were you ever deaf to me before?

SISTER MADDALENA (*in increasing excitement, while her whole body seems to sway in the direction in which her eyes are straining*). The Lord has promised me. I prayed but one thing of the Lord, that I might meet once more, face to face, mine angel of deliverance, fall at his feet——

MARIANNA (*despairingly and letting go the sister's dress*). He does not need you, but I, I——

(*Sister Maddalena, freed, starts forward. Marianna, with a cry, buries her face in her hands and sinks to the ground. At the cry Sister Maddalena checks her flight, turns and looks back.*)

SISTER MADDALENA (*panting with the violent conflict of her*

THE TOCSIN

emotions). O Lord, not this sacrifice! Show me not the Promised Land and bind my feet! The time is short! (*She half starts away once more, then looks back and echoes Marianna's words.*) Not need me! (*She utters a bitter cry.*) Alas, how should the cherished of the Most High need such as I? (*A deep quivering sigh bursts from her lips. The light fades from her face. Her arms fall to her sides. She turns slowly to Marianna, an expression of infinite pity creeping into her eyes as she looks down on her. She opens her arms with a gesture of noble and tender protection.*) Come, little one. (*Marianna leaps to her feet and throws herself on Sister Maddalena's breast; then lifting her head gazes off and points as in an agony.*)

MARIANNA. Lorenzo! Come, come away. (*She draws the sister feverishly by the robe and they go out.*)

(*Enter from grove Lorenzo and Bianca, Lorenzo carrying a spray of white hawthorn.*)

BIANCA. We have outstripped the rest.

LORENZO (*looking off in evident agitation*). Sister Maddalena? No, it cannot be.

BIANCA (*absorbed in trying to gain his attention and with an evident undercurrent of fear lest she may not*). You do not thank me for having given them the slip? And all for you.

LORENZO (*coldly*). For me today. For whom tomorrow? (*He turns away. Bianca watches him, her brow contracting. She fingers her dress nervously, then approaches him and holds out her hand with a gesture half beseeching.*)

BIANCA. I wait. My hawthorn.

LORENZO (*moodily*). It was not of you I thought when I pulled it.

BIANCA. Of whom, then?

THE TOCSIN

(*Lorenzo moves away with his eyes on the ground. Suddenly he stands motionless, then kneels down beside a tuft of violets. Bianca follows unobserved.*)

LORENZO. Blue violets! (*He puts out his hand as if to touch them, then draws it away as if stung.*) Marianna's eyes!

BIANCA (*aside*). Marianna's eyes! (*Aloud.*) Why did you start back?

LORENZO. Something—stung me.

BIANCA. Still they are sweet. Pick them.

LORENZO (*covering the violet tuft with a swift protecting gesture*). No!

BIANCA. Why will you not gather them?

LORENZO (*passionately*). Because I am not worthy, not worthy, O my God! (*He rises and turns from her, and half kneels on the lowest step of the shrine.*)

BIANCA (*looking down at the violets*). And yet I could crush them with my foot. (*She stands musing, then goes slowly toward him. He does not turn. She stands beside him. He keeps his eyes turned from her. She lifts her hand and lightly touches his forehead and hair.*) You look pale, Lorenzino. Pardon my touch, but those little damp curls on your forehead are so like my brother's, who died young. (*He partly turns toward her, as though the spell of her beauty were more than he could resist. Bianca still plays with his hair.*) Why, one has twined round my finger like a betrothal ring. I am weary, too, Lorenzo mio. Such weariness I never knew before.

LORENZO. I am sorry.

BIANCA. I was waking late last night over an old book of poems. One stuck in my memory. I hardly know what it means. Perhaps you can tell me. It runs thus:

THE TOCSIN

“ Oh, I’ve a Queen rose in my bower,

(She lays one hand on her breast)

But the white hawthorn is in flower !

(She takes the spray of hawthorn from his unresisting hand)

Down in the sunny lane it blows,—

Be thou patient, my royal rose.

I have a mind for one white spray :

(She sighs)

See, I will wear it here today ;

(She fastens it in his bosom, reading in his ardent eyes that she has conquered, and with a ring of triumph in her voice)

Only today, sweet rustic flower,

For I have a Queen rose in my bower.”

(She draws herself up with a superb gesture and flings back her head.)

LORENZO *(tearing the hawthorn from his bosom and throwing it underfoot)*. What is the white hawthorn to me when I have my Queen rose? *(He tries to seize her hands but she draws them away and glides off, smiling at him over her shoulder.)*

BIANCA *(tantalizingly)*. Have you your Queen rose? *(She points back.)* Here are others come to gather it.

LORENZO. Never. *(He seizes her hand roughly.)* Come, you shall listen to me.

BIANCA *(waving her hand to Count Salviati and Sir Walter who enter from the grove)*. The dance is beginning. Make haste. *(They start forward, but Lorenzo hurries Bianca off.)*

SIR WALTER *(pausing)*. Fairly outstripped in the race.

COUNT SALVIATI *(shrugging his shoulders)*. And by a mere boy. My scheme, too. She plays her part well,—if it is a part.

THE TOCSIN

(*Enter the Abbot, poring over an open scroll.*)

SIR WALTER. What does his Reverence say to it?

COUNT SALVIATI (*to the Abbot*). Your pardon for hurrying ahead. Has your Reverence observed the dance our fair will-o'-the-wisp is leading your ward?

ABBOT (*with affected solemnity*). *Varium et mutabile semper femina*. Gentlemen, I will give her ghostly counsel. (*He seats himself on the stone step.*)

COUNT SALVIATI. And let the moral be the shortness of Lorenzo's rent roll and the length of mine.

SIR WALTER (*pointing in the direction in which Bianca and Lorenzo have gone*). See, the peasant girls are gathered on the green.

COUNT SALVIATI. And there is the music. (*The sound of distant rustic dance music is heard.*) Surely your Reverence will go on to the festa?

ABBOT (*poring over his scroll*). My new library pleases me better than your thick-ankled *contadine*. See, gentlemen, of Carrara marble and well set among the cypresses.

(*They look over the Abbot's shoulder.*)

SIR WALTER. Your Reverence's taste is known.

(*Enter Brother Sebastiano hastily. He gives a paper to the Abbot.*)

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. From Florence, Reverend Father.

ABBOT. And you have been near the messenger? Stand back. (*He opens the scroll and reads.*) "The streets populated but by the unburied dead; a noisome pall hanging over the city; groans, curses, purple corpses heaped in the charnel-houses——" (*As he reads an involuntary shudder passes over him. The repulsion felt by a beauty-loving nature for the foul and ugly fills him with a sickening disgust. He tears the paper vehemently into bits.*) Pah!

THE TOCSIN

the Prior used not to have such bad taste. (*Harshly to Brother Sebastiano.*) We know all this. Why do you wait?

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. The answer, Reverend Father.

ABBOT. What answer? Have I not thrown open my abbey to the miserable wretches? My refectories? My gardens? Go.

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. They starve, Reverend Father.

ABBOT. Who? The dead? There are none but the dead left in Florence. (*He turns away, then perceiving Brother Sebastiano still timidly lingering, he fingers a ring he wears.*) What, not yet gone? Here, then. (*He draws off the ring.*) Take that. Sell it at Pistoia, and mind, at its worth. Prince Farnese gave it to me. (*Brother Sebastiano turns to go.*) And wait! my service of wrought gold, Cellini's work; the Cardinal will give you a lapful of broad pieces for it. He fancied it when he last supped with me. Sell it and feed and bury with it. Now go; and mind (*with a sudden gust of passion*), no more of your reeking tales! Do you think I do not know how they look, who die of the plague? The swollen limbs, the starting eyes, the pestilent odor, the—— (*He stands for a moment with wide eyes, as though transfixed with unspeakable horror; then passing his hand over his forehead, turns to the others with an attempt to assume his former lightness of manner. The Brother goes out.*) Pardon me, gentlemen. This uncouth simplicity, with his tales unfit for ears polite—from a child up, such sights and sounds have always unnerved me—but pardon me, as I was saying (*he spreads out the plan of his library*)—of Carrara marble, the frieze by Gian Bologna, a troop of drowsy leopards teased by dancing nymphs. (*He shivers again slightly and draws a long breath.*)

THE TOCSIN

COUNT SALVIATI. Your Reverence half persuades me to join your order.

ABBOT. You shall be cellarer in place of Brother Gregorius.

I mistrust Brother Gregorius; his paunch is too round.

(He makes certain marks on the parchment.)

SIR WALTER. Shall we not go on to the village? *(He points off uneasily.)*

ABBOT. Pardon me, gentlemen. Here is a mistake. I will wait your return. The *loggia* lacks airiness. I must speak to Gian Bologna.

COUNT SALVIATI. Had your Reverence cared, you could have beaten every architect in Italy on his own ground.

ABBOT. Count Salviati is too kind. And had I taken to the arts, what would Holy Church have done?

(Enter a group of peasant girls, gaily dressed, on their way to the festa. They make a reverence to the Abbot and are about to hurry on, when Count Salviati detains them.)

COUNT SALVIATI. Not so fast, my beauties. Here is music; here are partners.

SIR WALTER. The Countess——

COUNT SALVIATI. We have pursued too long. Let us try a show of indifference. *(He takes the hand of a girl, Sir Walter that of another. The Abbot paces up and down, poring over his parchment.)*

ABBOT. Yes, the *loggia* lacks airiness. *(He shivers.)* Pah! the fellow has left the smell of the charnel-house behind him. When I return, every building they have desecrated shall be razed to the ground—not a stone left standing. And some fools there are that have stayed behind. That sexless gray-robe, with her face of chalk, that flitted past us at the gate, was hurrying to Florence, it may be, and hoping to win eternal glory. *Per Bacco!*

THE TOCSIN

the eternal glory of this world is enough for me, could I forget,—forget! Ah, why did the imbecile come thrusting the taint of his purple corpses into this pure air! Come, my *loggia*! Gian Bologna shall not touch it. I myself shall make such a dream of wrought stone as will be the marvel of all ages. (*He moves off into the grove. The music comes suddenly to a stop and then begins in a minor, plaintive key.*)

COUNT SALVIATI (*taking a few more turns with his partner, then pausing*). Who could dance to that dirge?

PEASANT GIRL. It must be the blind fiddler from Prato.

COUNT SALVIATI. Let us make him change his tune. (*He goes out with Sir Walter and the peasant girls. The Abbot paces back and forth from the grove, immersed in his plan.*)

ABBOT (*his head over the parchment*). And here a column of red porphyry. These capitals I shall myself design. (*He disappears into the grove just as Marianna comes in on the other side. She keeps out of sight behind the shrine till the Abbot has gone and then she hurries to the spot where the discarded hawthorn spray is lying, picks it up, kisses it and places it in her bosom. She turns and looks back.*)

MARIANNA. But where is Sister Maddalena, now that I have brought her back to his Reverence? Oh, if I dared see him too, and send one word to Lorenzo! (*Looking off.*) Ah, she is waiting to bless that old man, and yet she seemed in such haste I could scarce keep up with her. (*She takes the hawthorn from her bosom and kisses it passionately.*) He pulled it, he held it, and she, she put it in his bosom and he plucked it out and threw it away. What was she saying to him? She touched his hair! O Holy Virgin, she touched the little curls on his forehead, and I—I had ridden through the night for him. I saved

THE TOCSIN

him from death and he never knew. (*She mounts the steps languidly to the shrine, throws herself down before it, kisses the hawthorn spray and lays it at Mary's feet. Then she snatches it up vehemently and holds it against her breast.*)

No, no, not this, Holy Mother, I cannot give you this. He held it. It is still warm from his touch. The fields are blood-red with poppies; I will pull my hands full for you, and my heart, my broken heart, that I lay at your feet, but these flowers, do not ask me for these, Mother of Sorrows, not these. (*She puts the hawthorn in the folds of her bodice, rises and turns slowly. The Abbot has come from the grove and is looking intently at her. As, absorbed in her grief, she descends the steps, he comes forward.*)

ABBOT. Gabriello!

MARIANNA (*starting and covering her face*). Father!

ABBOT (*taking her hands from her face*). We have sought the country over for you. Why are you masking here?

MARIANNA. I am not masking, Reverend Father.

ABBOT (*looking at her fixedly*). No, your blushes tell me that. (*His voice sounds hard, as one suffering a disillusionment.*) How is it you can still blush? The masking came before.

MARIANNA. Forgive me, Father.

ABBOT. You saved Lorenzo. Can there be talk of forgiveness? Come, that he may reward you.

MARIANNA (*shrinking away*). No, no.

ABBOT. And you housed with us at the convent and we never knew! (*After a pause.*) There was something about you, boy—there I fall into the old trick—but there was something in your eyes of the freshness of the fields that half made me believe again in the old nursery

THE TOCSIN

legends of pure women and brave men; but, after all ——
(*he laughs cynically*).

MARIANNA. O Reverend Father, forgive me! I know it was a sin, but I meant no wrong. O Father, I had never left my home before, but he had been gone so long, so long, and I did not know where he was. And I thought if I called myself after the blessed Archangel Gabriel, no harm could come to me.

ABBOT. Who had been gone so long?

MARIANNA (*sinking her eyes*). He—is living—near here.

ABBOT. One of the villagers? (*Marianna makes no reply*.)

And he had gone to Florence? And you followed him? Where is he now?

MARIANNA (*almost inaudibly*). He loves me no longer, Father.

ABBOT (*stooping to hear, and his old belief and tenderness rushing back*). Loves you no longer?

MARIANNA. No, Father.

ABBOT. He loves some one else? (*Marianna covers her face with her hands*.) Then you hate him?

MARIANNA (*uncovering her face*). Hate him? O Father, I first know now how I love him. And every day, every hour I pray for his happiness.

ABBOT. His happiness with her? You call this love?

MARIANNA. Why, Father, how could I help but long for him to be happy? I love him.

ABBOT. Love him? So was I never loved!

MARIANNA. Is not this love? I cannot read in the great books you pore over; perhaps it stands written in them what love is; I only know this: when he loved me I was in paradise, and now that he has forgotten me, I pray the Holy Mother to let me die and to make him happy.

THE TOCSIN

ABBOT (*deeply moved and taking her hands reverently*). He must love you again. He shall. He is not worthy of you—no man could be. But who is the man? Let me go to him. If he were the son of the Grand Duke, you should have him. I never knew women could love like this! Where is he? Tell me, child. Trust me, little one.

MARIANNA. It is—he is ——

(*Lorenzo's voice is heard outside.*)

LORENZO (*calling*). No, Count, we wait for no loiterers.

MARIANNA (*starting*). Ah!

ABBOT. Trust me, child.

MARIANNA (*trembling*). They are returning from the dance.

Come, Father, not now, not now. (*She draws him with her to the grove. A group of peasants pass, then Lorenzo and Bianca enter.*)

BIANCA. What, not a pair of bright eyes among them?

LORENZO. I saw only yours.

BIANCA. Oh, Lorenzo, I hear such speech too often.

LORENZO. Never listen to it from others, only from me—
from me.

BIANCA (*letting her hand rest in his and sighing*). I wish I had not gone to the dance.

LORENZO. Why do you sigh?

BIANCA. Those peasant girls, after all they love as we do.
I read it in their eyes.

LORENZO. Do not sigh.

BIANCA. It had been better for you and better for me if I had sighed more in my life. As I look back, it seems all a mad dream.

LORENZO. Because love was lacking.

BIANCA (*wistfully*). Love?

LORENZO (*looking back*). What! Sister Maddalena here?

THE TOCSIN

BIANCA. Ah!

LORENZO. I cannot meet her now.

BIANCA (*shuddering*). No, no. The crown of thorns! She said, yet should I come! (*They look at each other fearfully and guiltily and hurry out. Marianna staggers from the grove to the shrine.*)

MARIANNA. Lorenzo! O Mother of Sorrows!

ABBOT (*catching her in his arms as she falls fainting*). Lorenzo, the man? And you, Marianna? And it was I lured Bianca to come between you! O Lorenzo, my boy, to have robbed you of this—you whom I love better than life! O my God, what have I done!

(*He kneels down by Marianna, raises her reverently and tenderly on his breast and bears her out. Groups of peasants returning from the festa continue to pass, among them Count Salviati and his partner. Count Salviati puts his arm about the girl but she pushes it away.*)

PEASANT GIRL. Not now; do you not see the Holy Sister is following us?

COUNT SALVIATI. Make haste, then. (*They go on, and amid a group of villagers Sister Maddalena enters. When she reaches the shrine she pauses and looks eagerly about.*)

SISTER MADDALENA (*breathlessly*). Marianna? Where is she?

VILLAGERS. Farewell, Sister. Bless us. (*They kneel for her blessing, which she gives automatically as though her thoughts were far from them. They rise and go out. As the last one leaves, she throws up her arms with a gesture of joyous exultation.*)

SISTER MADDALENA. Now! (*She turns toward the castle.*) O blessed walls that give him shelter! Oh, after all these years, at last, at last! (*She starts forward, then hurries to*

THE TOCSIN

the shrine.) One prayer, first, of thanksgiving! (*She mounts the steps and throws herself down before the Virgin, but after a moment rises feverishly and fearfully, her face full of perturbation.*) What has come to me? I have no words to pray. Only a great sea of joy surging over me, and *his* face, his and not the Virgin Mother's! Oh, is it any mortal longing that moves me? Is the old taint not yet scourged away? The flesh still uncrucified? (*In agonized inward conflict.*) O Lord, Lord! it is for Thee and for Thy glory I would fall at his feet,—he who brought me to Thee! Have mercy on Thy hand-maiden! Search my heart! Dost Thou deny me this? Wouldst Thou visit me with Thy wrath because my feet faltered at the cry of the stricken child Marianna? Ask not this sacrifice! Have I not labored in Thy vineyard? Oh, is it my heart of flesh that still cries out? Give me a sign! All is dark. I know not which way to turn. Send down Thine angels to me, as in times past! (*She stands breathless, her eyes fixed, her arms outstretched, silent at first, then speaking in a far-away monotone as one in a trance.*) Light, light ineffable,—I cannot see for light,—wings, tier on tier. Bear me up, O blessed ones, lest I faint! A great hush. Hark!—Which of the bright host spake?—One? All?—What were the words? “He needs you.” (*A wonderful radiance steals over her face.*) Needs me? Me? (*She stands rapt and motionless, her lips parted, her eyes fixed in mystic ecstasy. Little by little her lips move as if in silent, awestruck prayer, then with a gesture of unutterable joy she breaks into speech.*) Needs me? Have I heard aright? Even me, the dust at his feet? The Lord hath spoken. Thy voice, O Lord of Hosts! Thy behest! I may go to him! I am answered!



ACT IV

SCENE I—*Bianca's dressing-room. Bianca seated at a table with a casket of jewels before her. She rests her chin on her hand and gazes off as one lost in thought. In one hand she holds a letter.*

BIANCA (*dreamily*). The title of Marchioness and (*lifting a string of jewels*) these. And the Grand Duke's favor for—how long? And if Bianca Cappello dies! And Lorenzo? (*She fingers the jewels, clasps a bracelet about her wrist, then a string of rubies about her neck, takes up a coronet, rises, goes to a mirror and fastens it in her hair. She stands head erect and proud gazing at herself in the mirror, then paces restlessly up and down, returns to the mirror, then to the table and takes up the letter.*) And the Duke's messenger waits for my answer! (*She starts suddenly, goes to two wide closed doors at the back of the stage and listens intently with bent head and finger on lip.*) All quiet! (*She returns to the mirror and looks at herself again, less critically and more passionately.*) If he could see me now! (*She laughs with a touch of scorn.*) See me in the Grand Duke's jewels! Lorenzo! and Sister

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Maddalena! (*She stands with parted lips, her bosom heaving, her eyes full of a vague terror.*) She said, yet should I come!

(*Enter Nita.*)

NITA. Pardon, my lady.

BIANCA (*turning angrily*). Who called you?

NITA. Pardon, my lady, but the messenger waits.

BIANCA. When I wish to see him I will ring.

NITA. Pardon, my lady, but if my lady knew how beautiful she looked, she ——

BIANCA. Leave the room!

NITA. Pardon, my lady. (*Exit.*)

(*Bianca goes to the closed doors, listens a moment, stands lost in thought, then slowly unclasps bracelet and necklace, takes the coronet off and lays the jewels in the casket. Then she rings. Nita enters.*)

BIANCA (*pointing to the casket*). Give this to the messenger, and he may tell his master Bianca delle Torre has jewels and titles enough.

NITA. Ah, but the beautiful jewels! (*She goes reluctantly to the door.*)

BIANCA (*half rising*). Wait! (*She seems to struggle with herself a moment, then motions Nita away. Nita goes out. Bianca sits motionless, her face resting on her hands, her eyes dreamy, gazing off into space. Enter Lorenzo suddenly with a drawn dagger. He moves silently, swiftly, looking about as if for some one he fully expected to find. Bianca turns and sees him and watches him in scornful silence. He catches her eye. She looks apprehensively at the closed doors and he rushes toward them triumphantly. Swiftly she glides between and stands with her back against them, her arms outstretched across the panels.*)

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BIANCA. Whom are you searching for?

LORENZO. De' Medici's messenger. Where is he?

BIANCA. Not here.

LORENZO. Then it was de' Medici himself?

BIANCA. Insolent!

LORENZO. I have a message for the Duke. Let me pass.
(*Grasps her arm.*)

BIANCA (*with sudden pleading in her voice*). Lorenzo, there is no man there; but I will be open with you,—the Duke's messenger was here——

LORENZO. Let me pass. I would not be rough with you.

BIANCA. But I sent him away and his jewels with him.
(*More pleadingly.*) See, I am frank with you, Lorenzo *mio*; the Grand Duke sent me jewels but I would not have them.

LORENZO (*with a bitter laugh*). Jewels by a white carrier-dove, was it not so? That white dove you befooled me with the first day I ever met you?

BIANCA. Lorenzo!

LORENZO. How a little point of steel can tame a woman!

BIANCA (*laying her hand on the hand which holds the dagger*).
Do I fear you?

LORENZO. A brave woman by all the saints! (*He starts to throw open the doors, then turns away with a gesture of bitter indifference.*) No, hide whom you will behind your doors. What is it to me! (*He glances about in sudden wonder, as if coming to himself, and hurries to the outer door.*)

BIANCA (*feverishly*). Lorenzo, I have been thinking over many things here in the moonlight. (*She goes to the table.*) See. I was thinking of—of Marianna (*he turns with a start*), and I have set aside these pearls for her. (*She takes up a necklace.*)

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LORENZO (*full of anguish and amazement*). Marianna! (*He goes toward Bianca.*)

BIANCA. Yes, for Marianna.

LORENZO (*with sudden passion*). Hush! Not that name on your lips! The saints', the Holy Virgin's name if you will, but not that name on your painted lips. (*He tears the string of pearls from her and throws it underfoot.*)

BIANCA. Lorenzo!

LORENZO. Those about Marianna's throat?

BIANCA (*with a strange meekness*). They were my mother's. I have never worn them since as a child she used to twine them in my hair.

LORENZO. What, no lover's kisses on them? But let them lie. Marianna will not need them in Heaven.

BIANCA. In Heaven?

LORENZO. She went to Florence to find me—is dead, it may be! (*Turns to the door.*)

BIANCA (*following him*). Now if she were in Heaven!

LORENZO. Hush!

BIANCA. Now if she whom you will not let me name were in Heaven! (*She lays her hand on his arm.*)

LORENZO (*looking at her in dull wonder*). And once I thought you a pearl.

BIANCA. If she were dead and if I said I loved you?

LORENZO (*oblivious of Bianca and sinking again into his grief*). Followed me to Florence to die!

BIANCA. My God, did you not hear me say I loved you?

LORENZO (*unheeding*). Houseless and alone!

BIANCA (*barring the way*). Lorenzo, it is true I mocked you at first, played with you, tried to break your heart till Heaven knows I broke my own! (*He tries to thrust her aside; she bars the way and clings to him.*) Have I not

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given up everything for you? Offended the Grand Duke?

Sent back his presents? You do not believe I love you?

LORENZO. I am weary of hearing you say you love me!

BIANCA. You will never hear me say it again.

LORENZO. Now to Florence, to Marianna! (*He turns to go. As he reaches the door Bianca, who has stood battling with herself, cries out.*)

BIANCA. Lorenzo! (*He pays no heed, and Bianca rushes to the two closed doors and throws them back, disclosing Marianna swathed in white, lying as if asleep on a couch. The moon-light from two tall mullioned windows falls on her.*)

Lorenzo! Look.

LORENZO (*turning*). My God! Marianna!

BIANCA. Hush!

LORENZO. Dead and here!

BIANCA. The Abbot brought her fainting from the fields.

LORENZO. Not dead!

BIANCA. We calmed her with a sleeping draught.

LORENZO. How did she come here?

BIANCA. You remember the Abbot's page!

LORENZO. Who rode for my pardon! Where were my eyes! (*He steals nearer Marianna.*)

BIANCA. Where were your eyes? In mine then.

LORENZO. I never loved you. (*He approaches Marianna, kneels down and buries his face in the hem of her robe.*)

BIANCA. No! (*She presses her hands to her heart.*)

LORENZO (*still on his knees and with a great fear in his voice*).
Is it sleep—or—death!

SCENE II—*Courtyard of the castle. Behind the towers and battlements the moon is rising. From the lighted chapel at the rear comes the muffled peal of the organ and the solemn*

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chanting of a midnight mass. At one side under a pent-house hangs a great bell. In the foreground at a stone table, lit by torches and candles, sit Count Salviati and Sir Walter over their wine. The Abbot is pacing moodily up and down. Brother Sebastiano stands near.

COUNT SALVIATI. Very good, Sir Walter! (*To the Abbot.*)

But your Reverence does not laugh with us.

ABBOT. Pardon me. I am dull. I had bad dreams last night.

SIR WALTER. The news from Florence?

ABBOT (*as if he had not heard and gazing moodily before him*).

Did you ever tempt a bird, a little singing bird, to your knee and then while it perched there and let its heart out, crush it so, with your hand, like—— (*changing his tone and reaching for a glass*). The wine, gentlemen.

SIR WALTER. Was that your dream?

COUNT SALVIATI. Do you dream on foot? I heard you pacing your chamber half the night.

ABBOT (*lifting his glass and throwing back his head as if to dispel heavy thoughts*). This cures bad dreams. Did you ever hear, Count, that a cup of wine got me my famous watch and my mitre?

COUNT SALVIATI. All Florence has it, it was your Reverence's great sermon.

ABBOT. And what do you think was sponsor to the sermon? Come, then, if my forty years may bore you with tales of my youth. (*A knocking is heard at the castle gate. Brother Sebastiano goes and opens the little wicket.*)

SIR WALTER (*placing a chair*). Do us the honor.

(*The Abbot seats himself at the table.*)

ABBOT. It was at the time of the Archbishop's visit to

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Florence. Our Prior—I was at San Marco's, had just finished my novitiate—our good Prior was to preach before him in the cathedral.

BROTHER SEBASTIANO (*coming forward and plucking the Abbot's sleeve*). Pardon, Reverend Father, but ——

ABBOT (*waving him off*). To the devil with Florence! I will hear no more of it, I tell you.

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. Pardon, Reverend Father, not Florence, but a woman.

ABBOT (*waving him off*). To the devil with the women! (*Brother Sebastiano reluctantly desists.*) It was the celebration of high mass. The cathedral was packed, the Archbishop on his throne, when the Prior was seized with a dizziness. One of the brothers must take his place and read the sermon. They hurried to the convent. Chance chose me!

COUNT SALVIATI. Who calls Chance blind! (*The knocking, low but determined, is heard again. Brother Sebastiano goes to the gate.*)

ABBOT. I had five minutes for preparation. "To your beads," cried our almoner,—he was a pious man; but the cellarer gave me a nod and a beck and jingled his keys. "I have something that will keep your knees from shaking under you," he whispered.

(*Brother Sebastiano, who has been standing at the wicket, again comes to the Abbot.*)

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. She will not take no, Reverend Father.

ABBOT (*paying no heed to Brother Sebastiano, but continuing with growing recklessness*). I tasted, I drank, I was glorious. I hurried to the cathedral, I mounted the pulpit. A sea of heads stretched before me. In a trice the wine,

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the devil, my guardian angel, who knows, conspired. I flung aside my notes. Something struggled for a moment on my lips and then leapt to speech. I was preaching, not the Prior's sermon, but my own.

COUNT SALVIATI. Bravo!

SIR WALTER. Well done!

ABBOT (*rising*). Every eye was upon me. My voice rose. The blood beat in my temples. There was a sob from one of the women. It was like a spur. Another, I took the bit in my teeth! Women tore off their jewels and cast them on the flags. The whole throng swayed toward me. They were mine.

COUNT SALVIATI. *Bravissimo!*

SIR WALTER. And the Archbishop?

ABBOT. Breathless like the rest. Afterward, in the sacristy, holy man, he fell on my neck and gave me his blessing, his famous watch, and the Abbey of San Raffaello.

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. O Reverend Father, she says she must see you before she dies.

ABBOT. What are you dinning into my ears? Who is she? What is she?

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. I do not know, Reverend Father.

ABBOT. Is she fair?

BROTHER SEBASTIANO. Her face is covered, your Reverence.

ABBOT. Come, then, to put an end to your importunity. Gentlemen, shall we unveil the beauty?

COUNT SALVIATI. By all means.

ABBOT. Let her in. (*He snatches up one of the torches, laughing. Brother Sebastiano opens the gate and admits Sister Maddalena.*)

SIR WALTER (*to Count Salviati*). By the Holy Mass—look!

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COUNT SALVIATI (*starting*). The gray Sister!

(*Sister Maddalena, her hood drawn over her face, advances toward the Abbot, and when within a few paces of him kneels down with bowed head and her arms crossed on her breast.*)

ABBOT. What do you want of me?

SISTER MADDALENA. Your blessing, Holy Father.

ABBOT (*gaily*). Your face, Holy Sister. (*He throws back her hood and flares the torch in her face, and as the light falls on her pure worn features he starts back sobered.*) You must be she they call St. Maddalena. (*To Count Salviati and Sir Walter.*) I pray you, gentlemen, one moment. I will join you. (*Exeunt the Count and Sir Walter.*) (*Harshly.*) I have no blessing for you!

SISTER MADDALENA (*clasp ing the hem of his robe*). O Father, let but the quickening grace of your benediction rest upon me before I die. I go to Florence.

ABBOT. To Florence! To hell!

SISTER MADDALENA. To Florence, to bliss eternal, won for me, the greatest of God's sinners, through your words, your prayers!

ABBOT (*bitterly*). My prayers! When have I prayed?

SISTER MADDALENA. Mock me not, Father.

ABBOT. Mock me not, Sister. When have I ever seen you?

SISTER MADDALENA. O Father, I was of those in the cathedral, when the spirit of God descended upon you, and you spoke with tongues of flame. (*Swept by her memories of the past, she rises from her knees.*) All about me the great mass swayed and surged. Men sobbed, women fell fainting on the cold stones. You scourged the vanities of this world. I tore the jewels from my throat; you

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plucked the secret sin from out my bosom; you spoke to me, to me alone in all the throng! The sword-thrusts of your words slashed and rent my guilty breast. Then, oh, with what angel voice you pleaded the passion of our Lord—pardon, redemption, peace! My heart melted in me. “O Christ,” I cried, “I come, I come!” (*The Abbot stands motionless, Sister Maddalena becomes more impassioned.*) I left my home, my friends, my lovers; I sought refuge in the mountain fastnesses to mourn my sins. As the sands of the sea, so were my lamentations, yet peace came not. Then across my desolation swept the wail of the sinning, the stricken, the forsaken. “As thou doest it to the least of these,” cried a voice, and I went again among men. But now to nurse the suffering, plead with the murderer, the harlot; mount the scaffold to clasp the despised hands of those condemned to shameful death. O Father, the tears of souls redeemed, their prayers, their halleluiahs, the aspirations of their breaking hearts turned through my weak aid to God, I come to lay here at your feet, before I die. (*She casts herself on her knees before the Abbot and kisses the hem of his garment. He stands as though struck dumb; then with a sudden cry, snatches his robe from her hands.*)

ABBOT. “And the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.” O my life, my barren life, burst like Aaron’s rod into this miracle of flower! O my God, whom I have denied and mocked! (*A low, solemn chanting as of a dirge is heard without. The Abbot turns impassioned to Sister Maddalena.*) I, the instrument of your salvation? At my feet your crown of tears, of prayers, of faith triumphant? I, unworthy to loose the latchet of your shoes! I, stained with a thousand sins, false priest, untrue to every vow!

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Up, up from the dust where I should lie! (*He takes her hands and attempts to raise her.*)

(*The dirge sounds nearer. There enter two monks chanting and with flaring torches in their hands. Following them pace slowly and solemnly four more brothers bearing an open bier strewn with white flowers, on which, as though wrought in alabaster, Marianna is lying. Lorenzo walks beside her. As his eyes fall on the Abbot, he starts forward, half frenzied.*)

LORENZO. Her death be on your head, you who parted us.

ABBOT. Marianna! Dead!

(*The brothers set down the bier.*)

LORENZO (*perceiving Sister Maddalena and clutching her robe in an agony of supplication*). O Holy Sister, save her!

SISTER MADDALENA. Whither are you carrying her?

LORENZO. To the chapel, the wonder-working image of Our Lady.

ABBOT (*bending horror-struck over Marianna and stretching out his arms over her with a gesture of infinite tenderness*). My work!

(*Lorenzo turns from Sister Maddalena and seizing the Abbot's arm thrusts him away.*)

LORENZO (*mercilessly*). Not your hands on her; it were profanation,—you who lured me into the snares of the courtesan.

(*The Abbot staggers back, his hand on his heart, as if struck by a mortal blow. Sister Maddalena touches Lorenzo's arm in stern command.*)

SISTER MADDALENA. Peace.

LORENZO (*seizing her robe*). But you, so pure, so holy, you have power with Heaven. Your robes are not, like his, a mockery of religion. She breathes yet. Wrestle

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for her with the angel of death. I broke her heart. Give her back to me or one grave holds us both.

(Sister Maddalena lays her hands gently on Marianna's wrists and forehead. She turns a moment with quivering lips toward the Abbot, then bends over the sleeping girl.)

SISTER MADDALENA. It is sleep, not death.

LORENZO *(half incredulous)*. Sleep?

SISTER MADDALENA. Even now she stirs. Let your face be the first she sees.

(Lorenzo kneels down by the bier gazing into Marianna's face. Sister Maddalena stands above her. For a moment her eyes wander, with a look of anguish, toward the Abbot, who stands bowed and motionless. Then with an evident effort at control, she steadies her voice and speaks to Marianna in a tone of quiet command.) Marianna! *(The girl stirs slightly.)* Marianna! *(Marianna's eyelids flutter and she looks up dreamily.)* Marianna! *(Marianna, supported by Sister Maddalena, half rises on her elbow. The monks fall on their knees, crossing themselves and murmuring, "A miracle!" Lorenzo kneels breathless. As Marianna's eyes fall on him, a wonderful smile dawns over her face. She draws a deep sigh of joy.)*

MARIANNA. I must be in Heaven, for your eyes say they love me. *(Lorenzo, speechless, clasps her hands.)* I am too happy to question you.

LORENZO. Forgive.

MARIANNA. I shall live now.

LORENZO. Forget.

MARIANNA. I have forgotten all.

(She sinks on his breast. He draws her from the bier. They have eyes only for each other, and supporting her in his arms, Lorenzo leads her off. The brothers follow with the

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bier. As the lovers pass him, the Abbot starts forward. Marianna, her head pillowed on Lorenzo's breast, does not see him. Lorenzo makes an involuntary gesture of aversion, and drawing Marianna closer to him passes out. The Abbot turns and leans heavily against the wall, his head buried in his arms. Sister Maddalena sways, then stands gazing yearningly at him. She half unconsciously makes a step toward him and stretches out her arms.)

SISTER MADDALENA. Crushed, broken, desolate! (*She dashes her hand across her eyes, vainly striving for control. The deep waters have passed over her.*) Oh, these woman's tears! when I should have the tongue of men and of angels! Lord, not this cup, not this! If ever Thy handmaiden hath found favor in Thy sight, my life for his, my soul, my salvation! Lord, forget not it was he who led me to Thee. O star of my life, dim, fallen! (*The Abbot turns. Their eyes meet. She starts toward him with outstretched hands. He draws back.*)

ABBOT. Did you not hear him say my touch was profanation? (*In spite of himself Sister Maddalena takes his hands. He looks into her eyes. The harshness, the broken-hearted despair in his voice give place to an almost awestruck wonder.*) What, still tears for me? (*They gaze long and solemnly into each other's eyes, then with a voice still tremulous, but made vital by a great hope and perhaps with a touch of a great joy, but half understood, Sister Maddalena breaks the silence.*)

SISTER MADDALENA. Count it for you too, sleep, not death that has lain upon you,—sleep, since that hour when your real self woke and spoke. What you were in that moment, be again.

ABBOT. Can these bones live?

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SISTER MADDALENA (*with growing calm and conviction*).

"Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live."

(*As she speaks, the Abbot seems for an instant to kindle with the white heat of her passionate faith; then a horror, as of a great darkness, sweeps over his features. He snatches away his hands with a bitter cry of despair.*)

ABBOT. Too late!

SISTER MADDALENA (*in an agony of appeal*). Not too late! O Lord, quicken Thou my feeble woman's force. Through the bitterness of these tears the power goes from me. (*Suddenly she draws herself up to her full height, and with a superb gesture of command towers above him.*) No time now for despair! Your city; your people!

ABBOT (*echoing her cry in a tone of piercing self-accusation*). My city, my people left to perish! (*His eyes fall on the great bell hanging under the penthouse. He hurries toward it and seizes the rope. The bell peals out tumultuously. As the sound swells, men-at-arms and monks throng out into the courtyard. The doors of the chapel swing back and the officiating priest in his robes, followed by deacons and altar-boys with cross and censer, file out. They group themselves, silent and wondering, the monks nearest the Abbot. Bianca appears in the arch of the chapel door. The Abbot lets fall the rope and turns to the brothers, his arms outstretched.*) Not I but Florence summons you,—Florence from her hundred mouths of sin, famine, pestilence, despair. Who am I that should dare call you back, I who led you astray? Blind leader of the blind! But through this angel of the Lord rings a cry from the death-stricken city, its desert palaces, its reeking hovels. Shall she return to minister alone? Back, back all of us, to tend

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the suffering, hold the sacred cross before dying eyes, bury the unhallowed dead! (*Horror-struck, the monks murmur and draw away.*) What, you shrink back? (*Sister Maddalena steps to the Abbot's side. Bianca watches, breathless, her hands clasped on her breast. The Abbot hurries on aflame.*) You hug to your craven breasts the hideous sin I helped you to? You love this little life of the hour too well to risk it for a glorious immortality? O God, be mine the penalty, mine the retribution, base shepherd of a coward flock! (*Bianca falters a moment, then hurries forward and throws herself at Sister Maddalena's feet. The sister raises her tenderly. The Abbot takes Bianca's hand silently, and seeks inspiration once more at the triumphant eyes of Sister Maddalena; then leaving the women and seizing a cross from one of the deacons holds it aloft. An irresistible power seems to have fallen upon him. With a common impulse the brothers fall on their knees. The Abbot looks across the white-robed mass and his voice rings out like a clarion.*) I shall go and you shall follow! I will wrestle for you with the powers of darkness! I will save your souls alive! I will pluck them back from the gates of hell, whither I had led them! Ye are Christ's, ye shall be Christ's! Back, back to your deserted posts, to glorious pain, to death, to life everlasting! (*The monks hesitate a moment, falter, sway as though swept by a wind, then leap to their feet and rush forward with a great cry.*)

MONKS. To Florence! To Florence!

ABBOT. To Florence! (*He holds the cross aloft. He is transfigured with joy. The two women follow, and all sweep after him, crying, "To Florence! Florence!"*)

THE END.

HISTORICAL REFERENCES

A LAW FORBIDDING ARMS

Sixtus had forbidden short arms to be worn on pain of death, yet one day from Prince Farnese's pocket tumbled a small pistol at the very feet of the pontiff. He was ordered to be hung the same night at the first hour. Ferdinand, then on good terms with Cardinal Farnese, determined to save his kinsman, and found means to retard every clock in Rome one full hour, all except the pontiff's. At the moment appointed for the execution he repaired to the Vatican and demanded mercy for his friend. Sixtus, seeing that the time was passed and, as he thought, the execution over, most graciously accorded it; whereupon Ferdinand repaired to the Castle of St. Angelo and carried off the prince in triumph.—NAPIER, *Florentine History*, Vol. V.

CHARACTER OF POPE SIXTUS V.

Peretti's character is thus described in a letter of the day addressed to the Grand Duke of Florence by his agent, Belisario Vinti:

“The Pope is a grave and patient person who knows how to dissemble in proper time and place, but prudently and without fraud or malice. As an enemy of falsehood and artifice he loves men of probity. He is literary, capable of state affairs, intelligent and experienced,—is resolved to be pope himself.”—NAPIER, *Florentine History*, Vol. V.

BIANCA CAPPELLO

The daughter of Bartolommeo Cappello, a Venetian noble, wife of an obscure clerk, Piero Buonaventuri, with whom she eloped and fled to Florence, Bianca became first the mistress and afterward the duchess of Francesco de' Medici. Her first husband was murdered, according to current report, at the instigation of the Grand Duke. Napier says that on the occasion of her marriage to de' Medici “she suddenly became the pride of her family, the glory of her order, the hope of her country, and was immediately adopted

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by public decree 'as the true and particular daughter of the republic in consequence of those most singular and most excellent qualities which rendered her worthy of the most splendid fortune.' * * * But the splendour of Venetian rejoicing was exceeded by that of Florence; jousts, balls, feasts, tournaments, bull-fights, the chase of wild beasts and every sort of pastime filled the city and adjacent hills and kept the Val-d'Arno alive with their echoes. * * * The whole expense of this marriage to the Grand Duke was estimated at 300,000 ducats, a sum equal to about one year's ordinary revenue of the ancient republic in its most glorious days."

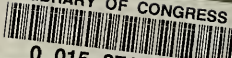
PESTILENCE

This pestilence attacked Florence in July and killed many of the poorer classes who were suffering from two successive years of scarcity which all the efforts of the office of Abundance could hardly remedy. The people were, moreover, out of humour with the government, unhappy and angry at being rifled to meet the expenses of their sovereign's marriage, just at a moment when failing harvests, sickness and general misery required more than usual leniency.—NAPIER, *Florentine History*, Vol. V.

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